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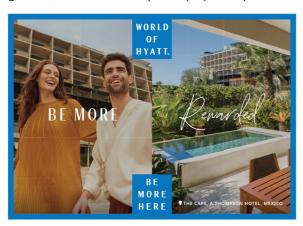
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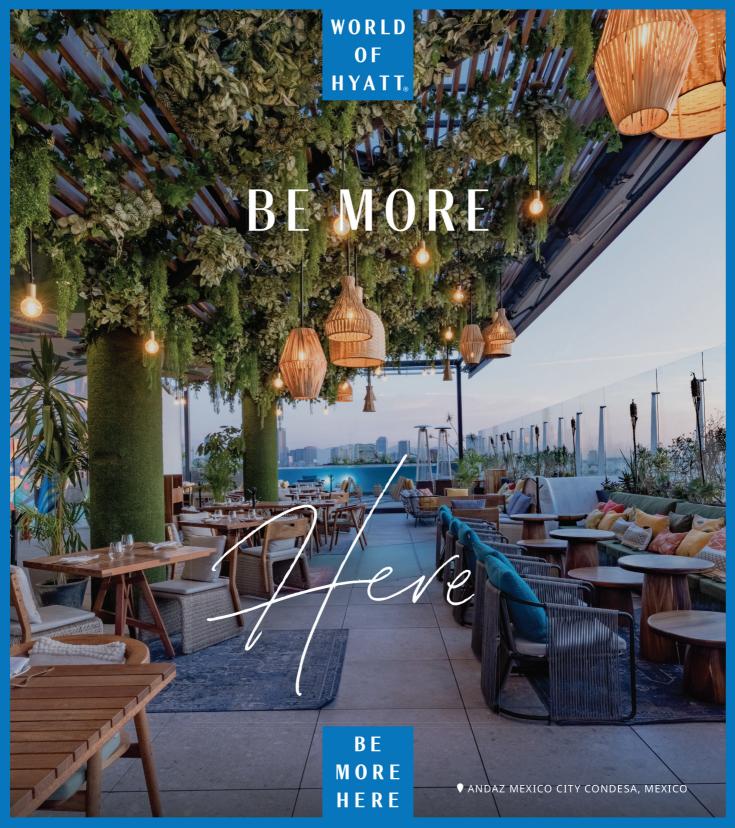
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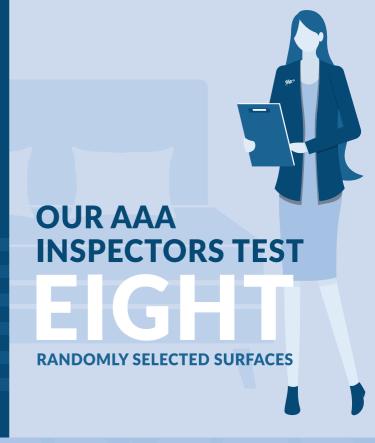






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### **Mexico**

exico in the 21st century stands at a crossroads of sorts. Perhaps nowhere else on Earth is there such a difference between old and new, between the traditional past and the unpredictable future.

Timeless "Mexican" images still exist, of course. Donkeys amble down dusty paths, and ancient ruins stand silhouetted against the sky. But for every small village where a herd of goats comprises the local traffic, there is a vehicle-choked freeway. And for every local market displaying live chickens, hand-woven baskets and piles of dried chile peppers, there is a glitzy mall offering the latest in upscale merchandise.

The extremes of wealth and poverty here can be shocking. Half an hour away from Cancún's glittering resorts sit windowless, thatch-roofed huts with dirt

floors. In bursting-at-the-seams Mexico City, high fashion and haute cuisine coexist with sprawling shantytowns lacking running water.

But while a Third World way of life is still unfortunately the norm for many Mexicans, visitors benefit from a strong and growing first world of hotels, restaurants and related amenities, as well as a cultural heritage richly expressed through fiestas and national celebrations. This makes Mexico a fascinating country that can be explored rather easily. What are you waiting for?

### **Historical Overview**

Historians don't know where Mexico's native peoples originally came from. But somewhere around 5000 B.C., in the valley of Tehuacán southeast of Mexico City, a straggling tribe of seed gatherers figured out how to domesticate maize, a grain plant, becoming corn farmers in the process and establishing permanent villages.

Eventually cities were built. At a time when much of Europe was decidedly primitive, civilizations in the New World were making significant architectural, scientific and artistic advances. The ruins of pyramids, palaces and temples in central and southern Mexico left behind striking evidence of the Olmec, Maya, Toltec and Aztec cultures that flourished, in some cases, more than a thousand years before the arrival of Spanish explorers.

The Maya people were particularly accomplished; they developed the mathematical concept of zero and produced a calendar enabling priests to predict eclipses and track the movements of the solar system. But the Maya also enthusiastically participated in ritual bloodletting and human sacrifice, which they believed helped foster communication with their gods. From about 200 B.C. through the eighth century, the vast Mayan empire spread north from Guatemala to the Yucatán Peninsula.

In the early 1300s the fierce, nomadic Aztecs migrated from place to place in search of a prophetic vision: an eagle perched on a cactus pad, clutching a serpent in its beak. According to legend, that vision was seen on an island in the middle of a lake within the Valley of Mexico. Settling at the site of present-day Mexico City, they built a city that was economically advanced by the beginning of the 16th century. It was the Aztec thirst for ruthless dominance that led to their undoing at the hands of equally ruthless Spanish conquistadores.

The brutal conquest of the Aztecs gave Spain the infamous distinction of wiping out hundreds of years of Indian achievements in Mesoamerica. Spanish reign was insignificant politically but momentous socially. Mexico's colonial cities, its grand cathedrals and most of its historic buildings were constructed during 3 centuries of Spanish rule.

Spain justified its continued presence in Mexico on the basis of converting the natives—considered barbarians—to Christianity. The church thus played a singular role in the colony of New Spain, which consisted of all Spanish possessions in North and Central America. Augustinian, Dominican and Franciscan friars (and later the Jesuits) all journeyed to New Spain to minister and teach, and missions were established in the depths of the wilderness.

Mexico's struggle for independence resulted from two things: the divisiveness bred by a rigid class system, and the continuing exploitation of a vast outpost off which only Spanish colonists profited. Freedom was finally achieved in 1821, but political turmoil was the rule rather than the exception throughout the remainder of the 19th century and into the 20th.

Rapid industrial growth and economic improvement came in the mid-20th century. The new Mexican prosperity was put on world view during the 1968 Summer Olympics, held in Mexico City. A guerrilla uprising, a political assassination and a devastating currency devaluation—all in 1994—threatened the country's leap from developing nation to world player, and in more recent years parts of the nation have been wracked by the violence of warring drug cartels.

### **Natural Features**

Mexico is a geographical transition point from the North American continent's topographic and climatic extremes to the more uniformly tropical features of Central America and the Caribbean basin. Its sun-scorched deserts and jagged mountain ranges are harsh, but they also have an austere beauty. In contrast are verdant valleys, cool highlands and mile after mile of sandy, palm-fringed beaches.

Roughly triangular in shape, Mexico narrows from 1,300 miles across its northern frontier to a mere 140 miles at the Isthmus of Tehuantepec. Two peninsulas— Baja (Lower) California and the Yucatán Peninsula—are appendages to the mainland. The terrain is mostly hills or mountain ranges broken by level plateaus, with the plateaus carved into many canyons and valleys.

The Sierra Madre comprises three great mountain ranges. The Sierra Madre Oriental and the Sierra Madre Occidental form the eastern and western boundaries of the central plateau region. The Sierra Madre del Sur frames the Pacific coast through the states of Guerrero and Oaxaca. The height of the mountains is accentuated by deep valleys and canyons, which can plunge more than 1,500 feet below the general level of the plateau. There are hundreds of volcanic peaks in Mexico; in the state of Michoacán alone there are more than 80.

The backbone of the Baja California Peninsula is formed by several westward-sloping mountain ranges. The Yucatán Peninsula, on the other hand, is primarily flat or rolling; its highest point is barely 1,000 feet above sea level. Much of the subsurface rock is limestone, and subterranean erosion creates many cenotes, sinkholes that fill with water and become natural swimming pools.

The Baja California and northwestern mainland coasts are marked by numerous bays and coves. Farther south, Pacific breakers crash against the feet of the Sierra Madre Occidental and the Sierra Madre del Sur. The Yucatán Peninsula's eastern coast boasts two outstanding natural features: powdery sand beaches and the clear, aguamarine waters of the Caribbean Sea.

### **Mexico**

**Travel Regions** 







### **People**

The Indians, or *indigenas*, living in Mexico today are direct descendants of the Aztec, Maya and other ancient civilizations. They speak a primary language other than Spanish, and many might express surprise if referred to as "Mexican." While it may be convenient to lump all Indians together, Mexico's native peoples are characterized by linguistic and cultural differences that can be as distinct as those defining Norwegians and Italians.

Ethnic groups populate different parts of the country. They include the Tarahumara, who dwell in the Copper Canyon region of northwest Mexico; the Yaqui, in the state of Sonora; the Huichol and the Tarasco, near and along the central Pacific coast; the Nahua and the Otomí, in the central plateau region; the Zapotec and the Mixtec, in the state of Oaxaca; the Chamula, Tzeltal and Tzotzil, in the state of Chiapas; the Huastec, along the eastern Gulf of Mexico coast; and the Maya, throughout the Yucatán Peninsula.

The status of *indígenas* in today's Mexico, unfortunately, is not a whole lot better than it was during the era of Spanish rule. Poverty is a chronic, debilitating fact of life for the majority of the country's Indian communities, including many in economically challenged southern Mexico. Indian rights—particularly the demand for self-rule—has been a thorny issue for the Mexican government, especially since the 1994 uprising in the state of Chiapas that was led by the guerrilla Zapatista group.

The great majority of Mexicans are *mestizos* of mixed European and Native American descent. They have perhaps the strongest sense of national identity, although occupying various levels of prosperity and social standing. The small percentage of citizens of purely European ancestry, sometimes referred to as the "Thousand Families." control much of the country's political power and economic wealth, just as the Spanish once did.

Many Mexicans have a strong streak of fatalism. Aztec ceremonies revolved around human sacrifice. The Spanish conquest wiped out entire cities. Postindependence Mexico endured war, revolution, assassinations and civil strife. The people have weathered hurricanes, erupting volcanoes and devastating earthquakes. Thus it's no surprise that death is both honored and mocked in such celebrations as the Day of the Dead, when decorated sugar skulls are sold, costumed children bear mock coffins in street parades and families pay tribute to deceased members in front of lavish home altars.

Priority is given to both family and holidays. On weekends city dwellers exit the concrete jungle en masse for beaches, parks and lakeside resorts. A minor saint's day is reason enough to hold a fiesta, and the birthday of a national hero or the date commemorating an important historical or religious event merits a major celebration.

### **Architecture**

Archeological sites—some little more than a few earthen mounds or a crumbling platform, others the spectacular remains of cities—offer intriguing clues as to how their creators lived. Mexico's first great architects were the Maya. They constructed ceremonial centers connected by straight, wide roadways of crushed limestone called sacbe (sack-BEH). These ancient roads were marvels of engineering, since the flat land denied builders an elevated vantage point while planning construction through dense, scrubby jungle.

Mayan buildings took three main forms: the pyramid, often with a temple capping the summit; the palace, consisting of a central court surrounded by chambers; and the ball court, a wide, flat area used for playing a mysterious but presumably sacred ball game.

Essentially a religious monument, pyramids frequently had steps built into the sides. Stone, particularly the porous, volcanic rock known as tezontle, was the building material of choice. Exterior carvings not only served as decoration but also depicted historical and mythological events.

Unfortunately, Spanish conquerors destroyed many Indian architectural achievements, and frequently chose razed ground as the spot to erect their own buildings. The Spanish conquest ushered in a 300-year period during which ecclesiastical architecture predominated, often imitating prevailing European trends.

Augustinian, Dominican, Franciscan and Jesuit friars built churches throughout Mexico as part of a large-scale attempt to convert the natives to Christianity. These structures, distinguished by thick walls and simple interiors with vaulted ceilings, were impressively fortified to serve as protection against Indian attack. A monastery built around an enclosed patio was usually connected to the church. Decoration also served an educational purpose, as frescoes and stone carvings vividly depicted the symbolic themes of the new religion.

Lavish ornamentation became the rule, and its ultimate expression was a Mexican development known as Churrigueresque. Named after Spanish artisan José de Churriguera, buildings in this style exploded with carved geometric forms, leafy vines, frolicking cherubs, scrolls and other imaginative accents. Churrigueresque interiors were a cornucopia of extravagant embellishment, often executed in gold; the overall intent was literally to knock one's eyes out.

During much of the 19th century Mexico was disrupted by war and political turbulence, and when relative prosperity returned under dictator Porfirio Díaz the new round of public buildings were mostly massive structures that again reflected what was happening in Europe. The Palace of Fine Arts (Palacio de Bellas Artes) in Mexico City was designed and executed by Italian architects following classic blueprints, while wealthy hemp exporters in Mérida gave their ornate mansions a refined Parisian influence.

The early 20th century found Mexican architects struggling for a style to call their own. Attempts at monumentality produced such misguided curiosities as the gigantic statue of José María Morelos, a hero of the Mexican War of Independence, built on an island in Lake Pátzcuaro.

In the last half of the century, however, innovative architecture resulted from the combination of old and new design elements in buildings like the National Museum of Anthropology in Mexico City and those on the campus of the National University of Mexico (UNAM) in the Mexico City suburb of San Angel. Large-scale resorts in Cancún, Los Cabos and Acapulco are striking examples of contemporary architecture, often incorporating ancient motifs in ultra-modern settings.

### Music and Dance

Mexico's musical traditions are exceedingly rich and abundantly varied. As with architecture and art, styles tend to originate elsewhere before being assimilated and frequently adapted to suit the national preferences: passion, romance and insistent rhythms. Popular folk and dance music in particular vividly evokes the country's sights, sounds and moods.

Indian musical expression is ceremonial in nature, often linked to religious rituals or village fiestas. But within the mixed *mestizo* population music has a genuinely mass appeal that is strengthened by a healthy recording industry, ceaseless radio play and impromptu performances that enliven the main plazas of practically every town in the country.

Little is known about what sort of sounds were created by pre-Hispanic civilizations. Music, singing and dancing did, however, play a large role in daily ceremonial life. The mesmerizing beat of the drum was foremost among ancient instruments. Drums were fashioned out of clay, wood, bones and turtle shells. Rattles complemented the beat, and simple reed or clay flutes added a melodic counterpoint. It might well have sounded similar to what is heard in some Indian villages today.

Spanish *conquistadores* and the missionaries who followed them imported European culture. Folk orchestras began to accommodate new instruments, chief among them various types of guitars. The son (also called *huapango*), a driving dance rhythm with plenty of instrumental flourishes, is the basic form of mestizo music. Regional styles have different names, but the guitar is usually the lead instrument, sometimes replaced by violin or harp.

Another traditional sound comes from the marimba, a percussion instrument similar to a xylophone. When struck with small rubber mallets, the marimba's hardwood bars produce clear, breezy-sounding tones. Marimba music is most commonly heard in southern Mexico and Guatemala, where town plazas resonate with its lively rhythms on fiesta days.

Popular Mexican songs have long evoked the trials and tribulations of daily life. The corrido, a folk narrative descended from Spanish balladry, emerged during the turbulent period of the 1910 Revolution and served as a news service of sorts in the days before radio. The canción is a slow, unabashedly sentimental ballad. No less dramatic are *rancheras*, nostalgic paeans to home and country originally sung by Mexican cattlemen.

But the music most associated with Mexico is the sound of the mariachis. The custom of hiring a group of professional musicians to play at weddings, birthdays and other special occasions began in the state of Jalisco. Mariachi bands deck themselves out in the costumes of the *charro*, or Mexican cowboy: tight-fitting pants, wide-brimmed sombreros and lots of silver spangles. They regale foreign tourists, play to homesick laborers in border towns and serenade the object of a young suitor's desire—all for a fee, of course.

Mariachi bands started out playing guitars, violins and harp, with the brassy sound of trumpets later replacing the harp. The style reached its peak in the 1950s, when Mexican matinee idols in Hollywood films sang love songs to the strains of mariachi music. A mariachi band worth its salt will be able to reel off a variety of songs from long-established classics to customer requests in styles from achingly sad to irresistibly upbeat—and all delivered with undeniable heart and soul.

Cumbia, a seductive, danceable import from the Caribbean, was the most popular music in Mexico in the 1980s; the songs are distinguished by flirtatious lyrics often spiced with double entendres. Equally danceable salsa is popular as well. And concerts given by brass bands fill parks and town halls throughout the country.

Native folk dances are one of Mexico's most enjoyable traditions for visitors. Although Spanish conquistadores initially tried to eradicate what they viewed as simply pagan rites, Franciscan and Dominican missionaries encouraged the continuation of Indian dances and

wove these age-old rituals into their ongoing efforts to convert the natives to the Catholic church.

Like music, folk dances vary by region. Around Papantla in the state of Veracruz, Totonac Indians still perform the flying pole dance, originally a ceremony meant to appease the rain gods. In the states of Sonora and Chihuahua, Yaqui and Tarahumara Indians perform the deer dance, a ceremony once meant to impart good luck on the hunt. A dancer in this vivid re-enactment may even wear the stuffed head of a deer.

Los Viejitos, the "Dance of the Little Old Men," originated in the state of Michoacán. Danced by young boys wearing masks that resemble a much older visage, it begins with them moving slowly in a parody of old age, but by the end the pace enlivens considerably.

Popular traditional dances are based, not surprisingly, on Spanish steps. Everyone knows the *jarabe tapatío*, or Mexican hat dance. The costumes for this passionate interlude are flamboyant: for men, the silver-embroidered shirt and trousers and wide-brimmed sombrero of the horseman *(charro)*; for women, the national costume, a *china poblana* dress. It ends with the man's sombrero placed on the floor and the couple snappily parading around it.

### Food and Drink

Authentic Mexican dishes have many influences, among them Maya, Aztec, Spanish, French, Moorish and even Chinese. There is much more to the cuisine, however, than the commonly mistaken notion that it is

always hot. Many items in use throughout the world originated in Mexico. Corn is the country's greatest contribution to global cookery, but the list also includes tomatoes, chocolate, avocados, squashes, beans, pumpkins, chiles and turkeys (the only bird bred in pre-Hispanic Mexico).

Corn, the centerpiece of the Indian diet, took on an almost magical significance in many cultures, being used in religious rituals and ceremonies. Called *teoxintle* until the Spaniards renamed it *maíz*, the different corn varieties enabled native cooks to put this versatile vegetable to assorted uses—grinding kernels to make tortillas, thickening soups, creating beverages.

A thin wrapper made from coarse cornmeal, the tortilla is universally known and appears in many guises. A tortilla wrapped around a filling is a taco, one of the earliest Mexican foods as well as the one most commonly embraced north of the border and around the world.

Flour tortillas are used for northern Mexican grilled meat tacos, replaced by smaller yellow or white corn tortillas in central and southern Mexico. These small, soft tortillas are often doubled to hold a filling and sold in orders of two or three. Tortillas also are rolled around fillings and then fried until the tortilla is crispy, a nod to the hard taco shells popular north of the border.

Chopped onion and cilantro are the classic toppings, augmented by salsas, chopped radishes and cucumbers, grilled green onions (cebollitas) and the juice of lime wedges (limones). Fresh chopped salsa with tomatoes, onions and cilantro is called salsa casera. Cooked



red salsas utilize dried chiles, while salsa verde, made with tomatillos—the small, tart-tasting tomato native to Mexico—is green. Another garnish is guacamole, usually a thinner version than the chunky variety used as a dip.

There are numerous versions of the standard street taco, and different regional favorites throughout the country. Around dusk the storefront taquerías open, street vendor carts begin setting up and the air is filled with the tantalizing aroma of grilling meat. In the evening tacos can be the basis for a light supper (cena) and also are a preferred late-night snack.

Tacos al pastor and tacos de carnitas are twin favorites. A Mexican adaptation of Middle Eastern spit-grilled meat, tacos al pastor are made with marinated pork stacked on a vertical spit above a gas flame. As it roasts the meat is shaved off, heaped on a tortilla and topped with grilled onions, cilantro and often pieces of fresh pineapple. In Puebla a variation of tacos al pastor called tacos arabes is wrapped in a thicker tortilla similar to pita bread and served with a spicy, deep-red salsa flavored with *chipotle*, dried *jalapeño* chiles.

Tacos dorados, also called taquitos or flautas, are tortillas rolled around a filling, usually cooked chicken or beef, then fried and topped with shredded lettuce, cream (crema) and grated Mexican cheese. In Baja California and along the Pacific coast fish tacos are popular; batter-dipped, fried filets are wrapped in a tortilla along with shredded cabbage, guacamole, salsas and onions marinated in vinegar.

As long as you follow a couple of basic commonsense rules, indulging in street tacos—some of the tastiest food in Mexico—should not result in digestive problems. Trust the judgment of locals and look for a taco stand that has lots of customers, a sure sign the food is good. Pick one that specializes in a certain type of taco rather than offering a wide variety; fewer ingredients mean that they are likely to be fresher.

There are taco variations as well. When covered in tomato sauce and served with melted cheese, soft rolled tacos are called enchiladas. Crisp fried tortillas spread with minced chicken, meat or salad are tostadas. Tortilla dough turnovers filled with cheese are quesadillas; when filled with potato, pork sausage or refried beans and then fried in fat, they become *empanadas*.

Like tacos, tamales are made from a corn-based dough to which lard is added, creating a mealier texture. A *tamale* is filled with bits of chicken, pork or such sweets as chocolate, wrapped in corn husks or banana leaves and then steamed. Sopes are flat, thick disks of dough made from ground corn treated with lime juice (masa) that are baked on a griddle. Topped with various

combinations of meat and vegetables and garnished with cheese, salsa and cilantro, sopes are best eaten right after they've been made.

Tortas are sandwiches prepared with a small loaf of bread called telera or bolillo and then filled with different meats, lettuce, onion, tomato, cheese and avocado. The cemita, which originated in the city of Puebla, is a sandwich on a soft, sesame-seed egg roll. The meat is usually pork or beef pounded thin and then deep-fried; fillings include onions, sliced avocado and mild white cheese.

Like the taco, two Mexican side dishes are known around the world. *Frijoles* (beans) are cooked in various ways and served either whole or mashed, or combined with rice, vegetables, chicken livers, plantains or eggs. Guacamole is usually seasoned with onions, hot peppers and chopped tomatoes.

Street food can be as simple as pieces of freshly peeled fruit sold in a plastic cup or threaded on a skewer. A popsicle vendor can be found on almost every city street corner. Churros, sold from carts, are ridged, tubeshaped pieces of fried dough that are dusted with sugar or filled with fruit or chocolate. Corn on the cob (elote) is roasted in the husk, then speared on a stick and spread with condiments like butter or sour cream and sprinkled with cheese or red chili powder. The kernels also are cut off the cob and served in a Styrofoam cup to which the condiments can be added.

### **Festive and Regional Fare**

A distinctly Mexican concoction is *chiles rellenos*, or stuffed chiles. A dark green chili pepper—not the sweet bell variety—is stuffed with cheese or ground meat, fried in a coating of egg batter and then simmered in tomato sauce. A variation of this dish is called chile en nogada. Instead of tomato sauce, the chili (stuffed with beef, pork and fruits) is covered with ground fresh walnuts and a pureed white cheese similar to cream cheese. When sprinkled with red pomegranate seeds and garnished with parsley, the dish represents the red, white and green colors of the Mexican flag. It is frequently served in conjunction with independence celebrations during the month of September.

At the time of the Spanish arrival, the staple diet of the Indians included such items as grasshoppers, ant eggs, rats, armadillos, monkeys, parrots and rattlesnakes. In Mexico City and Oaxaca you can sample crunchy fried grasshoppers (chapulines) dashed with chili powder and lime juice, ant eggs (escamoles) and worms (gusanos de maguey)—also crisply fried—that live on the maguey plant, from which tequila is made. Huitlacoche is a black, truffle-like fungus that grows on

ears of corn; it is often served with crepes. In northern Mexico broiled goat (cabrito) is popular.

In and around Veracruz the specialty is *huachinango* a la Veracruzana, red snapper broiled in tomato sauce and served with onions, olives and capers. Acapulco and other seaside towns are known for their ceviche (say-VEE-cheh). Pieces of raw fish or shellfish are marinated in lime juice for at least eight hours, "cooking" the fish. Chopped tomatoes and onions, chiles and such herbs as cilantro are then added. It's served chilled, often as an appetizer.

In the Yucatán Peninsula the food has Cuban, Caribbean, European and Asian influences. The fiery habanero chile common in Yucatecan cookery grows nowhere else in Mexico. Achiote, the tiny red seed of the annatto tree, is the primary ingredient of a pungent paste with a distinctive orange-red color that seasons pork, chicken or fish cooked pibil style—a distant relative of American barbecue.

Yucatecan menus offer such authentic dishes as cochinita pibil, pork rubbed with achiote, wrapped in banana leaves and baked in an underground oven; frijol con puerco, a pork and black bean stew garnished with cilantro, radishes and onions and served with rice; and huevos motuleños, a filling breakfast dish featuring a tortilla covered with refried black beans, topped with a fried egg and smothered with tomato sauce or chile-spiked salsa, peas, diced ham and crumbled white cheese, usually served with slices of fried banana or plantain.

Pozole, a hearty soup native to the state of Jalisco but popular in many parts of Mexico, incorporates hominy and pork or chicken in a flavorful broth. Shredded lettuce, chopped onions, strips of fried tortilla and splashes of lime juice are frequently tossed in. This stewlike concoction also takes on red or green hues from the addition of ancho chiles or green tomatoes mixed with various greens, respectively. Most Mexican chiles are hot, and some are incendiary, so ask "Es muy picante?" ("Is it very hot?") if in doubt about their firepower.

### **Beverages**

Cafe de olla is flavored with cinnamon and sugar, although you'll have to ask for cream (which usually turns out to be evaporated milk). Espresso and cappuccino are widely available—and undistinguished instant is frequently served in restaurants—but Mexicans favor cafe con leche, a combination of strong black coffee and hot milk that is often poured into a tall glass. Another favorite is Mexican hot chocolate, which is not as sweet as the American version.

Freshly squeezed fruit juices are inexpensive and refreshing. Ask for a licuado (fruit shake) made with bananas or papayas. Also inexpensive are local soft drinks (refrescos); try Mexican coke, which is sweeter than Coca-Cola. They are not only safe to drink out of the can or bottle but one of the few luxuries that poorer citizens can afford. Tehuacán, in the state of Puebla, is famous for bottled mineral waters made with and without natural fruit flavors.

Cerveza (beer) is ubiquitous, and two Mexican varieties—Corona and Tecate—are sold everywhere; the latter is the country's No. 1 cheap alcoholic beverage. Dos Equis and Bohemia are two quality brews appreciated throughout the world.

Mexico's viticultural history was relatively late in developing. Although pre-Hispanic peoples enjoyed fermented beverages, those derived from the grape were not among them. Spanish colonists introduced the first vine cuttings, and Mexican wines soon began competing with those of the homeland. Today most of the domestic vintages are produced in the state of Baja California. Other major wine-producing areas are in the states of Aguascalientes, Querétaro and Zacatecas.

From the maguey (mah-GAY) plant come several highly intoxicating liquors. Tequila is the quintessential one, traditionally downed from a salt-rimmed glass and immediately followed by a bite into a lime wedge. Bottles of mezcal from the vicinity of Oaxaca sometimes include a worm that lives on the plant.

Pulgue, manufactured in central Mexico from the maguey's unfermented juice, has less of a kick and is considered to have both nutritious and medicinal properties. Colonche is prepared in the states of Aguascalientes, Guanajuato, Jalisco and San Luis Potosí with fermented fruit from the prickly pear cactus. Rompope originated in the state of Puebla as a family beverage for festive occasions. Similar to eggnog, its ingredients include milk, egg yolks, sugar, vanilla, cinnamon and a dash of rum.

### **Dining Tips**

Local specialties can be found in smaller restaurants called *cenadurías*, *taquerías* or *merenderos*, which cater more to Mexican customers than to foreign tourists. In such establishments diners can order carne en su jugo (meat in its juice), tamales and a great variety of antojitos (snacks). The sign "Antojitos Mexicanos" indicates that these and other specialties are on the menu.

For those accustomed to an early breakfast, restaurants are not particularly accommodating; many don't open until around 9 a.m. Markets, however, normally open early and are good places to pick up something

for a morning meal. Another tip: Buy croissants or sweet rolls at a bakery the night before and have your own breakfast before starting the day.

If you follow the Mexican schedule for dining, you will have lunch no earlier than 2 p.m., cocktails at 7 p.m. and dinner at 9 or 10 p.m. *La comida* is the main meal of the day (*el almuerzo* also means lunch but tends to be a late morning snack eaten on the run). Many restaurants still offer a *comida corrida*, or lunch special, which usually includes soup, a main course, a dessert and coffee. For those on a budget, making this the big meal of the day is the most economical way to dine.

When you're ready for the check, say "la cuenta, por favor" ("the check, please"). Making scribbling motions on your hand to imply writing is commonly recognized international sign language. Regardless of the establishment, always ask about policies and double check the total amount of the bill. You might assume, for example, that there are free refills for coffee when in actuality you'll be charged for each cup you drink (a free second cup is more common at breakfast).

Some restaurants may compute the tab by adding up the number of glasses and plates on the table. The 15 percent IVA service tax (10 percent in the state of Quintana Roo and the Baja California Peninsula) may be added (sometimes the charge is 17 percent, which includes local tax); again, double check the individual amounts. This does not take the place of a tip, so leave what you think is appropriate, usually 10 to 20 percent of the bill.

### **Celebrations**

From the tiniest villages to the biggest cities, some sort of fiesta takes place practically every day of the year. And there's much to celebrate; in addition to observing national holidays and countrywide festivities like Carnaval and the Day of the Dead, every town salutes its patron saint's day.

Fiestas take on myriad forms, but almost every one includes a parade. The procession is usually in association with a revered religious image but also can be secular in nature, often capped off by fireworks. Music, dancing and an array of local edibles are essential elements. Costumed dancers may portray historical, mythological or imagined happenings to the accompaniment of indigenous instruments.

Regional and folkloric dances represent the area or state; mariachi or harp ensembles are the usual accompaniment. The Yucatán has its evocative *jaranas*, danced by couples in white costumes to the lilting

sound of a band. Yucatecan fiestas, called *vaquerías*, are particularly joyous and colorful.

Mexico's best-known celebration, one in which both Indian and Catholic traditions blend into a unique expression of love for the deceased, is *Los Dias de Muertos*, or Days of the Dead, which are celebrated on Nov. 1 and 2. A straightforward approach to the uncomfortable subject of mortality, the holiday—celebrated in Mexico for centuries—mixes mourning with macabre humor and pagan rites with the Catholic observances of All Souls' and All Saints' days.

Families may honor departed loved ones by telling stories, eating candy skulls or even camping all night in the local cemetery while decorating gravesites, praying and sharing memories. The holiday is downplayed by some as superstitious ritual or quaint religious holdover, but that doesn't stop most of the country from celebrating each November with food, drink, flowers (specifically marigolds, the "flower of the dead") and skeleton figures known as *calaveras*.

The popular belief that the dead are permitted to visit their living kin provides the latter a chance to prepare culinary offerings, which usually include sweet loaves of pan de muerto (bread of the dead). A lavish home altar (ofrenda) could include candles, mementos, pictures of the departed, a bottle of favorite liquor, dancing skeletons, a portrait of the Virgin of Guadalupe and a display of marigolds. Everyone sings, dances and prays, simultaneously sending up and accepting the inevitability of death.

Some of Mexico's loveliest traditions center on Christmas, despite the American influence of Santa Claus and Christmas trees. Foremost are the *posadas*, which take place for 9 days beginning Dec. 16 and represent the search for an inn (*posada*) in preparation for the holy birth. Bearing candles and figures of Mary and Joseph, guests circle a house begging for a place to stay, but are refused until the Pilgrims are identified. After that the party begins, with hot punch, sweets and the breaking open of *piñatas*. More and more, gift giving is on Christmas Day, although in smaller towns presents are still exchanged on the traditional Twelfth Night, or Epiphany (Jan. 6).

Another Christmas season tradition is the presentation of *pastorelas* in public plazas, schools and theaters. Based on the events immediately before Jesus' birth, they often have a comic touch. Some *pastorelas* include in their cast of characters such historical figures as Aztec emperor Cuauhtémoc and revolutionary Emiliano Zapata, who take part as if they had lived during that first Nativity.

The Lenten season culminates in Holy Week (Semana Santa) from Palm Sunday to Easter Sunday, which is marked by solemn pastorelas or a reenactment of the Passion from Judgment to Resurrection. The young man chosen to portray Jesus undergoes rigorous preparation for his role, which in some places includes being whipped and then tied to a cross. Again, the observance often ends with the burning of a papier-mâché figure, this time Judas. Holy Week celebrations also venerate the Virgin Mary, with processions bearing some form of her image.

Many Mexicans travel during Holy Week and the Christmas holidays, so make hotel reservations in advance if you'll be visiting during those times.

### Recreation

### **Outdoor Activities**

In Mexico you can play **golf** at world-class courses, many of which are located at the beach resorts. Los Cabos is famed for its immaculately groomed and devilishly challenging courses designed by pros like Jack Nicklaus. Most of the better courses boast stunning backdrops, from Baja's stark desert landscapes to Cancún's gorgeous beaches to Puerto Vallarta's jungle and mountain backdrops.

The majority of golf courses in Mexico are private and can be played by visitors only if they are accompanied by a member. Hotel-owned courses give preference to guests, although the hotel might be able to arrange access to a nearby facility. Fees at the better courses are expensive and comparable to those in the United States. If you don't bring your own clubs, you'll find rental clubs available at virtually all major courses.

The horse was considered a strange, frightening beast to superstitious Aztecs who first laid eyes on the steeds brought over by Hernando Cortés. These fears were overcome, and many Mexicans are enthusiastic riders. Horse**back riding** is an invigorating way to explore the starkly scenic stretches of northern Mexico, and this part of the country has a number of stables and ranches that rent horses and arrange riding expeditions. You can go for a beachside horseback ride in Baja California and along the Caribbean coast in the Riviera Maya, and at resorts in Acapulco, Mazatlán and Puerto Vallarta.

### The Lure of the Water

There are beautiful beaches along the Pacific and Caribbean coasts. The major resorts all offer the usual water sports, from water skiing and windsurfing to sailing and parasailing, and any necessary equipment is easily rented. Pay close attention to local warnings regarding surf conditions; many Pacific beaches have dangerous undertows and strong currents.

**Snorkeling** is excellent around the islands of Isla Mujeres and particularly Cozumel, where there are clear, shallow waters, brilliantly hued fish and intricate coral formations. The Baja California and Pacific coasts are more suitable for **scuba diving**, although Baja's Pacific waters are quite cold and the diving spots tend to be hard to reach. La Paz, in southern Baja on the Gulf of California, and Guaymas, on the northwestern mainland coast, have warmer waters, equipment rentals and resort facilities.

Other good bases for snorkeling and scuba explorations are Puerto Vallarta, situated amid the coves, rock formations and underwater ledges of the Bay of Banderas; Ixtapa/Zihuatanejo, where offshore rock formations create a variety of underwater sites; and Bahías de Huatulco, with nine lovely bays to explore.

If you're taking scuba lessons or have a referral letter from your home training center, check to make sure that the instructor or dive center you choose in Mexico holds U.S.-recognized certification, such as NAUI, PADI or SSI.

Mexico offers some of the best deep-sea fishing in the world, particularly around the southern tip of Baja



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California, in the Gulf of California, along the Pacific coast and off the eastern coast of the Yucatán Peninsula. Numerous tournaments are held each year. As part of a movement to protect natural resources, a catch-and-release policy is advocated for sports anglers.

A Mexican fishing license is required to fish in Mexico. The license covers both freshwater and saltwater species and is valid anywhere in the country, including coastal waters.

If you intend to fish in Baja California waters, contact the state tourism offices in Tijuana, Rosartio or Ensenada for fishing permit information. In Baja California Sur, contact the state's fishing permit office; phone (612) 123-3807. You also can obtain a Mexican fishing license at select fishing and tackle supply stores in San Diego.

License fees vary depending on boat size and time spent fishing (1 day to 1 year) and range from about \$12 to \$43 (U.S.). The cost is the same whether the angler is alone or part of a tour group. Everyone aboard private boats in Mexican waters must have a fishing license regardless of age and whether or not they are fishing. Licenses are not transferable. Skin divers and scuba divers who fish need a license as well. Boat operators normally provide licenses for people on chartered excursions, but double check before you go out on the boat. A license is not required when fishing from land.

The maximum catch per day varies by species. Generally authorized maximums are 10 fish caught per day, but not more than five of the same species. Catches of marlin, sailfish, swordfish and shark are limited to one per day per species; catches of tarpon, roosterfish, dorado and shad are limited to two per day per species. The limit on inland bodies of water is five fish per day, regardless of species.

Major hotels and independent companies at the resorts and in port cities can arrange fishing expeditions or provide boats and gear for hire. All nonresident private boats entering Mexican waters must obtain certification and a temporary boat permit from the Mexican Department of Fisheries in San Diego, a Mexican consulate office or a customs broker.

### Spas

For those who value relaxation and restoration over physical activity, Mexico's spas offer therapeutic resources used for centuries by indigenous peoples—an immense variety of native plants.

The nopal, a tropical prickly pear cactus, is a source of vitamin C and amino acids; helps the body pull fluids from tissues back into the bloodstream, thus diminishing cellulite and water retention; and is effective in regulating blood sugar for those who are diabetic.

The so-called "magic bark" of the tepezcohuite tree, indigenous to the state of Chiapas, has skin-healing and regenerative properties used to treat sunburn, blisters and blemishes. Mineral-rich volcanic mud stimulates circulation and relieves muscular and arthritic pain.

Hot springs and mineral water bathing resorts operate in Cuautla, Ixtapan de La Sal, Tepoztlán and other towns in central Mexico, but tourists are more likely to visit a spa at an upscale hotel or resort. These facilities are not only luxurious but state of the art. They offer pre-Hispanic treatments like the *temazcal*, a type of sweat house where hot stones and herbs help to purify the body, as well as aromatic exfoliations, nontraditional plant medicine therapies and sacred healing rituals. And you can cleanse body and mind with the sea or mountains—or both—as a breathtaking natural backdrop.

### **FAST FACTS**

**POPULATION: 129,150,971** 

**AREA:** 1,964,375 sq km (758,449 sq. mi.).

**CAPITAL:** Mexico City

HIGHEST POINT: Pico de Orizaba, Ver., 5,675 meters

(18,619 feet).

LOWEST POINT: South of Mexicali, B.C., 10 meters (33

feet) below sea level.

**LANGUAGE:** Spanish; some 50 Indian languages and many more dialects are spoken outside of major cities and towns. English is widely spoken, particularly in larger cities and at resorts.

**CURRENCY:** The exchange rate in December 2021 was about 21 pesos=\$1 U.S.; quoted peso-to-dollar equivalents in the guide are based on this conversion rate. Small daily rate fluctuations are standard.

**BANK HOURS:** Most banks are open Mon.-Fri. 9-5 in larger cities; some also open Saturday morning. Banks are closed on all national holidays, and may also be closed on local holidays.

BUSINESS HOURS: Many businesses are open Mon.-Sat. 8-7; some, especially smaller establishments, still close from 2 to 4 for the traditional long lunch break. In resort areas stores and shops are often open evenings and on Sunday. Shop hours may not always correspond to what is advertised, though. Shopping malls are generally open daily; many are closed Jan. 1, Good Friday, May 1 (Labor Day) and Christmas.

TAXES: Mexico levies a 16 percent value-added (Impuesto al Valor Agregado, or IVA) tax on many goods and



services, even telephone and internet services. An additional tax on hotel and beverage services means that some items can carry a 17 percent IVA tax. The tax is supposed to be included in the posted price or rate but is not always itemized separately on your bill; inquire if you feel you are being doubly charged.

**HOLIDAYS:** New Year's Day, Jan. 1; Constitution Day, Feb. (1st Mon.); Birthday of Benito Juárez, Mar. (3rd Mon.); Holy Week (Semana Santa); Good Friday, Mar. 29; Labor Day, May 1; Battle of Puebla (Cinco de Mayo), May 5; Independence Day, Sept. 16; Day of the Race (Columbus Day), Oct. 12; Revolution Day, Nov. (3rd Mon.); Christmas, Dec. 25. Banks, government offices and most stores are closed.

MEDIA: The News is an English-language newspaper published in Mexico City on weekdays. Many hotels and resorts provide USA Today for guests. The Sanborns restaurant/drugstore chain carries English-language magazines. Hotels offer free magazines with information about local dining and entertainment; most also offer U.S. TV channels.

ATTRACTION SCHEDULES: Before setting out for a day of sightseeing, check with the front desk at your hotel regarding schedules for local museums, archeological sites or historic buildings. Museums are often closed on Monday; admission fees are usually inexpensive. While free admission days or reduced fees for different age groups technically apply only to Mexican citizens, policies will vary depending on the attraction. The listings in this guide provide hours and admissions where known.

PUBLIC RESTROOMS: Take advantage of those in restaurants and museums wherever possible. Restrooms in small towns and out-of-the-way locations, particularly at gas stations, often have primitive plumbing and are definitely not up to the standards of public restrooms in the United States. Away from your hotel, it's a good idea to carry a roll of toilet paper and a small bar of soap; either of these necessities might be in short supply depending on circumstances.

**POLICE:** Few tourists ever run into trouble with the law, but you may need to ask police for directions or seek assistance for other reasons. While most officers are helpful. other encounters-mainly those involving alleged traffic violations—can be exasperating or intimidating, especially if you don't speak fluent Spanish. Always cooperate if stopped, but try to resolve the situation right away.

**RESOURCES:** Information hotlines, manned daily 24 hours by bilingual operators, can provide answers to questions regarding tourist destinations and services. In Mexico City phone (55) 5250-0123; elsewhere within Mexico, phone 01 (800) 008-9090 (toll-free long distance).

### MEXICO STATE CHART

LEGEND: STATE— ABBREVIATION— AREA (SQ. MILES)— POPULATION— CAPITAL

**AGUASCALIENTES**, Ags., 2,112, 1,312,544, Aguascalientes

**BAJA CALIFORNIA**, B.C., 26,996, 3,315,766, Mexicali **BAJA CALIFORNIA SUR**, B.C.S., 28,369, 711,235, La Paz

**CAMPECHE**, Camp., 19,619, 899,931, Campeche

**CHIAPAS**, Chis., 28,653, 3,556,574, Tuxtla Gutiérrez **CHIHUAHUA**, Chih., 94,571, 5,217,908, Chihuahua **COAHUILA**, Coah., 57,908, 2,954,915, Saltillo COLIMA, Col., 2,004, 712,029, Colima **DURANGO**, Dgo., 47,560, 1,754,754, Durango **GUANAJUATO**, Gto., 11,946, 5,853,677, Guanajuato **GUERRERO**, Gro., 24,819, 3,533,251, Chilpancingo **HIDALGO**, Hgo., 8,038, 2,858,359, Pachuca **JALISCO**, Jal., 31,211, 7,844,830, Guadalajara **MEXICO**, Mex., 8,245, 16,187,608, Toluca **MEXICO CITY**, CDMX, 571, 8,918,653, Mexico City MICHOACAN, Mich., 23,138, 4,584,471, Morelia MORELOS, Mor., 1,911, 1,903,811, Cuernavaca **NAYARIT**, Nay., 10,417, 1,181,050, Tepic **NUEVO LEON**, N.L., 25,067, 5,119,504, Monterrey **OAXACA**, Oax., 36,275, 3,967,889, Oaxaca **PUEBLA**, Pue., 13,090, 6,168,883, Puebla **QUERETARO**, Qro., 4,420, 2,038,372, Querétaro **QUINTANA ROO**, Q.R., 19,387, 1,501,562, Chetumal **SAN LUIS POTOSI**, S.L.P., 24,351, 2,717, 820, San Luis Potosí

**SINALOA**, Sin., 22,520, 2,966,321, Culiacán

SONORA, Son., 70,290, 2,850,330, Hermosillo TABASCO, Tab., 9,756, 2,395,272, Villahermosa TAMAULIPAS, Tamps., 30,650, 3,441,698, Ciudad Victoria

TLAXCALA, Tlax., 1,551, 1,272,847, Tlaxcala VERACRUZ, Ver., 27,683, 8,112,505, Jalapa YUCATAN, Yuc., 14,827, 2,097,175, Mérida ZACATECAS, Zac., 28,283, 1,579,209, Zacatecas SOURCE: MEXICAN CENSUS

### **Planning Your Trip**

Mexican travel planning depends on whether you'll be driving your own vehicle around the country, flying to one destination only, or flying to one destination and then driving a rental car to another. If you drive your own vehicle, specific regulations govern its temporary importation across the border. There's also your day-to-day, onthe-road itinerary to consider. Flying eliminates many of these additional details, particularly if a travel agency or tour operator is handling the logistics.

Expenses will be determined by your agenda. If you want frills or as many of the comforts of home as possible, travel exclusively by air or take a guided package tour, stay at internationally recognized hotels or all-inclusive resorts, and eat and shop at establishments that cater primarily to tourists. This ensures a hassle-free but likely



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very expensive vacation. But if you're willing to put up with the occasional lumpy bed or cold shower and don't mind giving up an orderly schedule, you'll reduce expenses and also experience Mexico on a much more intimate level.

While not essential, a knowledge of Spanish is helpful. English is spoken widely in large cities and at the major beach resorts. Hotel and restaurant staff and others in the tourism industry usually understand basic English. Small towns, Indian villages and rural areas in the Yucatán Peninsula and southern Mexico are another story, but if you know some words or phrases in the native tongue, Mexicans tend to overlook halting pronunciations and mixed tenses. The "Speaking of Spanish" section in this guide provides a handy list of common questions and needs.

### **Mexico Travel Regions**

There are eight geographic travel regions in this guide: Baja California, Northwestern Mexico, Northeastern Mexico, The Pacific Coast, Central Mexico, Mexico City and Vicinity, Southern Mexico and the Yucatán Peninsula. Each of these regions is color-coded on the Mexico Orientation map. Mexico offers varying levels of visitor amenities and many different things to see and do, so a knowledge of what each region offers can aid in trip planning.

NOTE: The U.S. Department of State website provides information that might affect U.S. citizens traveling abroad; go to travel.state.gov and link to "International Travel." For updated information regarding Mexico travel and security issues phone (888) 407-4747 (from the United States).

### Where To Go

Generally speaking, Mexico's priciest destinations are the big beach resorts like Cancún, Los Cabos, Puerto Vallarta, Acapulco and Ixtapa. For the first-time visitor, they offer the exotic lure of a foreign country without too much cultural displacement—you'll find American fast-food joints as well as thatch-roofed seafood shacks—and a greater percentage of locals who speak English. Mexico City, which is not a place for those seeking laid-back relaxation, is also pricey.

Much of Mexico away from the resorts and big cities provides a maximum of local flavor and a minimum of pampering. Getting close to nature at relatively remote and unspoiled areas is a trend that goes hand in hand with the understanding that preserving the environment also benefits tourism. Numerous tour companies offer specialized excursions based around biking, diving, hiking, kayaking and other outdoor activities; consult a travel agency for details. Biosphere reserves like Sian Ka'an in the state of Quintana Roo protect a rich variety of indigenous flora and fauna.

If you like or need a high level of comfort, an ecotour is not a wise choice. But for those who prefer unspoiled environments over AAA Five Diamond accommodations Mexico offers all kinds of options, from backpacking through the Baja desert to ziplining above the Yucatán jungle to mountain biking through the highlands of Oaxaca state.

Combine affordable comfort with the pleasure of experiencing new cultural perspectives by visiting one of the co-Ionial cities. Guanajuato, Querétaro, San Miguel de Allende, Taxco and Zacatecas, built by the Spanish, all have historical and architectural legacies. Oaxaca, San Cristóbal de Las Casas and Mérida are more off the beaten path, but each city is fascinating in its own right, and shoppers will find some of the best native handicrafts in Mexico. Guadalajara offers big-city amenities, authentically Mexican atmosphere and Western familiarity due to a large resident population of American retirees.

### When To Go

In most of Mexico the dry season—October through May—has the best weather. Rainfall patterns, however, vary greatly. In the highland region of central Mexico afternoon showers are likely at any time from June through September, but over a large portion of northern—and especially northwestern—Mexico, rain is infrequent throughout the year. In Chiapas and the normally wet coastal areas, heavy rains can wash out roads or cause mudslides.

Much of northwestern Mexico and Baja California is uncomfortably hot in the summer; in the coastal regions summer heat is exacerbated by high humidity. Conversely, fall and winter evenings in high-altitude locations can get quite nippy.

December through February or March is the high season at Mexico's beach resorts, and accommodation rates at tourist destinations like Cancún and Puerto Vallarta are at their peak. From April through November rates come down and crowds let up. Each resort has its own timetable; Cancún, for example, is crowded with U.S. spring breakers during March and April.

Easter week is perhaps the most popular time of the year for Mexican families to vacation. Many Mexicans also travel over the Christmas holiday period and during such major national celebrations as the Fiesta of the Virgin of Guadalupe on Dec. 12. For good weather, lower cost and crowd avoidance, a general rule of thumb is to go in the spring or fall.

It's a good idea to obtain advance confirmed reservations for accommodations at beach resorts and in most other Mexican cities during the peak travel seasons roughly speaking, December through June at the resorts and June through August at the inland cities. Reservations are imperative for the week preceding and following Easter. All things considered, one of the nicest times to visit is in November; temperatures are moderate, summer rains have turned much of the normally brown landscape a more welcoming green, and the busy holiday season is still a month away.

### What May Be Taken Into Mexico

If you're crossing the border in a vehicle you must first clear the Mexican customs checkpoint. After submitting a customs declaration form or oral declarations, you'll pass through an automated "traffic light" system. If the light flashes green there is no further action; if it flashes red your luggage will be inspected, regardless of previous declarations made to customs officials.

The most convenient time to cross is early in the morning on weekdays. Weekends—and especially holiday weekends—are the worst times in terms of potentially long waits. There's also the possibility of exasperating interactions with customs officials or time-consuming additional inspections at customs or immigration substations. But for the most part it's a streamlined process, especially if you're traveling light.

Airline passengers receive a customs declaration form (printed in English) on the flight listing all items that can be brought into Mexico duty-free and without prior authorization. The filled-out form is submitted to customs officials upon arrival at the airport entry point.



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Complaints regarding treatment by Mexican customs officials may be registered by contacting the Comptroller General's Office (SECODAM) in Mexico City; phone 01 (800) 001-4800 (toll-free long distance within Mexico).

Money: You may bring up to \$10,000 in U.S. currency and traveler's checks (or the equivalent in other currencies); any greater amount must be declared. U.S. traveler's checks, particularly those issued by the most recognized institutions, are normally easy to cash. It may be more difficult to cash Canadian currency and traveler's checks, so many Canadian travelers convert their money into U.S. currency beforehand.

When presented with sufficient identification, major credit cards are accepted provided that the credit card company normally operates in Mexico. Exchange rates are posted at currency exchange offices (casas de cambio) and banks. Banamex and Bancomer are two of the largest Mexican banks; most cities and towns have branches of one or the other.

If you transport or cause to be transported (including by mail or other means) more than \$10,000 in currency or negotiable instruments such as traveler's checks into or out of the United States, you must file a copy of Customs Form 4790 with U.S. Customs and Border Protection, 1300 Pennsylvania Ave. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20229.

**Personal items:** You may bring duty free clothing, footwear and other personal items. The allowance includes jewelry, perfume, toiletries, books and magazines (in a quantity that does not indicate they are for commercial purposes), and medicines for personal consumption (accompanied by prescriptions as appropriate and in accordance with quantities prescribed).

Unless acceptable proof of prior ownership is presented upon return to the United States, duty may be required on personal articles that are foreign-made. This proof can be a bill of sale, insurance policy, jeweler's appraisal or original receipt of purchase. Items with serial numbers or other permanently affixed identification can be registered with the nearest Bureau of Customs and Border Protection office before departure. The certificate of registration will facilitate re-entry into the United States should any question of prior possession arise.

Photographic equipment: One camera, including the power source (for non-digital cameras, the allowance also includes up to 12 rolls of unused film). One video camera and 12 blank cassettes also are admissible. Foreign-made cameras can be registered at the point of departure to prove that they were not purchased in Mexico. Tripods and flash equipment require special permits for use at archeological sites, museums and monuments.

**Weapons:** The only way to legally import firearms and ammunition into Mexico is to secure a permit in advance.

Tourists are not permitted to bring pistols, revolvers, automatic firearms or weapons of any type. Technically this includes all knives (pocket and Swiss Army knives, as well as switchblades and other knives that could be classified as weapons). Although tourists are not likely to be fined or incarcerated for bringing in knives for camping or personal use, you may want to purchase such a knife while in Mexico.

**Drugs:** If you require medicines containing habit-forming drugs or narcotics, properly identify all drugs, carry only the necessary quantity and bring a prescription or written statement from a physician. These safeguards will also help to avoid potential customs problems upon return to the United States. Trafficking in and/or possession of illegal drugs is a federal offense under Mexican law, and all such cases are rigorously prosecuted.

Other duty-free items: Also allowed are one tent and camping equipment, one surfboard, two tennis rackets, a pair of skis, a pair of binoculars, one new or used laptop or tablet computer, two cellphones, one portable digital audio player (such as an iPod), one CD player, one portable television set, one DVD player, up to 20 CDs or audiocassettes, up to five DVDs, a musical instrument that can normally be carried by one person, up to five toys (if the tourist is a minor), and personal items that compensate for or aid individuals with a disability.

The duty-free limit for the above items is usually per person or per individual family member. Also admissible are gifts or items up to a total value of \$300 (provided none are restricted) if arriving by air or sea, \$50 if arriving by land. These duty-free limits apply per each crossing or arrival. There are no restrictions on the containers in which items are imported. Any amount over the duty-free limit is taxed.

Each visitor 21 and over may bring in one liter of alcohol and one case of beer every 30 days; each visitor 18 and over may bring in one carton of cigarettes. Recreational vehicle owners can bring in kitchen, dwelling and/or bedroom furniture or utensils, a videocassette player and a bicycle (with or without motor).

Tourists are *not* permitted to bring live animals, fresh food products of animal or vegetable origin, or plants, flowers or fruits into Mexico. The following foodstuffs are allowed: dehydrated foods or canned fruit or vegetables, packaged coffee, dried spices, dry herbal medicines, canned or bottled jellies or fruit preserves, canned or bottled nuts and sauces, and U.S.- or Canadian-processed cheeses.

### **Packing Hints**

Bring clothes that are comfortable and easy to care for. In Mexico City and other high-altitude areas, a light coat is a good idea during the winter months, a sweater or jacket for other times. Sweaters also can ward off the chill

of air conditioning, which can be icy in those establishments that have it. Lightweight summer clothing is all you'll need for the beach resorts. For dining in an upscale restaurant appropriate attire is a sports jacket for men, a dress or pantsuit for women. An umbrella comes in handy for the rainy season (generally June through September).

A pair of sturdy, comfortable walking shoes is essential for exploring archeological ruins or even negotiating the frequently cobblestoned streets of cities and towns. A luggage cart is useful if traveling by bus, and it can save money at airports. If you plan to be on the go much of the time, a securely fastened shoulder bag may be more appropriate than a suitcase.

Take an extra pair of sunglasses, a hat and sunscreen, insect repellent (absolutely necessary in lowland and coastal areas and not always available in Mexico), a vacuum or plastic bottle for drinking water, and eye drops to ease discomfort from wind or glare.

Bring your own prescription drugs as well as useful items like batteries. Toilet paper is often missing from restrooms in out-of-the-way locations; in such situations try to carry a roll with you.

Electrical current in Mexico is 110-volt, 60-cycle AC-the same as in the United States and Canadawhich permits the use of small standard appliances like shavers and travel irons. In smaller towns electricity may be weak or even unavailable, so bring a small flashlight and a disposable razor.

### **Crossing the Border**

All U.S. and Canadian citizens entering Mexico by land must stop at the international border to show proof of citizenship and pay a fee to have their tourist permit validated. If you are planning on driving beyond the mainland border zone you also must provide the necessary forms for temporarily bringing a vehicle into the country, which necessitates a stop at a Mexican customs and immigration office. Hours of operation for these offices at major border crossing points are as follows:

### CALIFORNIA/MEXICO

Calexico/Mexicali—Daily 24 hours San Diego/Tijuana—Daily 24 hours

### ARIZONA/MEXICO

Douglas/Agua Prieta—Daily 24 hours Lukeville/Sonoyta—Daily 6 a.m.-midnight Nogales/Nogales—Daily 24 hours

### TEXAS/MEXICO

Brownsville/Matamoros—Daily 24 hours Del Rio/Ciudad Acuña—Daily 24 hours Eagle Pass/Piedras Negras—Daily 24 hours El Paso/Ciudad Juárez-Daily 24 hours Laredo/Nuevo Laredo—Daily 24 hours McAllen/Reynosa—Daily 24 hours

Travel Advisory: We do not recommend using the Nuevo Laredo or Reynosa border crossing due to the U.S. Department of State's "Do Not Travel" warning to the state of Tamaulipas. The acute level of crime and violence in this area prohibits AAA inspections.

U.S. and Canadian citizens traveling to Mexico must carry proof of citizenship. A valid (unexpired) passport book is the most convenient, since it ensures problemfree re-entry into the United States, serves as a photo ID and facilitates many transactions, such as cashing traveler's checks.

You can request a passport application form by contacting the National Passport Information Center; phone (877) 487-2778, or TTY (888) 874-7793. The U.S. State Department website has comprehensive passport information and online application forms; link to "passports."

Keep a record of your passport number. Make three photocopies of your passport identification page and other



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personal documents before leaving home. Leave one set at home, and carry two sets with you in a separate place from your actual documents.

U.S. citizens who travel across the Mexican border regularly for business reasons can apply for a passport card, a wallet-sized document that will facilitate entry and expedite document processing at official land and sea points of entry. The passport card has the same validity period as the standard passport book: 10 years for adults, 5 years for children under 16. Passport cards cannot be used for air travel.

All U.S. and Canadian citizens traveling between the United States and Mexico by air, regardless of age, are required to show a valid passport. Acceptable forms of identification when entering Mexico by land or sea are a passport or passport card. When leaving Mexico and reentering the United States by land or sea a passport or passport card, Enhanced Driver's License or Trusted Traveler program card is required. Children under 16 who are U.S. citizens can show the original or a copy of their birth certificate or other proof of citizenship, such as a naturalization certificate or citizenship card.

### **Tourist Permits**

All U.S. and Canadian citizens over the age of 2 must have a government-issued FMM (Forma Migratoria Múltiple) tourist permit—commonly referred to as a tourist card, but actually a form—in order to travel within Mexico. If you're entering Mexico by land, obtain your tourist permit at a Mexican immigration office at the official point of entry; proof of citizenship (a valid passport or passport card) is required. An immigration office is identified as *In*stituto Nacional de Migración/INM.

When applying for a tourist permit, minors (under age 18) traveling without their parents—i.e., alone or with friends or relatives—must present proof of citizenship. Minors who are not Mexican citizens are not required to present any other documentation if traveling unaccompanied by one or both parents.

Canadian citizens, including parents, traveling abroad with a minor should be prepared to document their legal custody of that child. If a minor is traveling with a friend or relative, the individual with the minor must have a notarized letter of consent from both parents (including a telephone number) or a custody document. In all cases it is important for the minor to have a valid Canadian passport. Mexican citizens living in the United States must go to the Mexican consulate nearest their place of residence and sign the legal documents granting permission for their child to travel unaccompanied in Mexico.

When departing Mexico your tourist permit must be returned to Mexican immigration; keep it in a safe place with your other important papers so it doesn't get lost. All visitors departing through land points of entry should request that their passport be stamped with an "exit" designation. You can be fined by Mexican immigration officials on your next trip into the country via a land point of entry if your passport does not show the "exit" designation from a prior visit.

For more details about tourist permits see the Border Information section in the back of this guide.

### Arriving by Air

International airports in all major Mexican cities and resort areas receive regular nonstop and direct flights from the United States and Canada. Some airports receive charter flights as well. Unlike nonstop service, a direct flight stops at least once (often through Mexico City) and may involve changing planes.

The following airlines provide service from selected cities in the United States and Canada to Mexican destinations:

**Aeroméxico**, (800) 237-6639 from the United States; aeromexico.com

Alaska Airlines, (800) 252-7522 from the United States: alaskaair.com

American Airlines, (800) 433-7300 from the United States: aa.com

**Delta Airlines**, (800) 241-4141 from the United States; delta.com

**JetBlue**, (800) 538-2583 from the United States; jetblue.com

United Airlines, (800) 864-8331 from the United States: united.com

Volaris, (855) 865-2747 from the United States; volaris.com

The major domestic airline is Aeroméxico, with flights linking the resorts and larger cities to Mexico City. The country's second largest domestic airline is Toluca-based. low-cost carrier Volaris, which flies to several mainland destinations, plus cities on the Baja peninsula. Smaller regional airlines, such as Aeromar and Aeroméxico affiliate Aeroméxico Connect, operate in different parts of the country. Traveling between destinations within Mexico often involves changing planes in Mexico City; schedules. fares and routes all are subject to change.

All arriving passengers must present valid proof of citizenship along with a filled-out tourist permit. Tourist permit and customs declaration forms are distributed on the flight (the tourist permit per individual, the customs declarationper individual or family). At the Immigration counter your tourist permit will be stamped with a "fee paid" designation before you proceed to the baggage claim area to retrieve your belongings.

The last stop is Mexican customs; make sure your declaration form is properly filled out. If you are just bringing personal items and have nothing to declare, you'll be directed to push a button. If the light is green you may proceed without inspection. If the light flashes red your luggage will be routinely searched. If you do *not* declare items over and above the \$300 allowance and pay all applicable duties and are caught by a red light, you will be fined.

Airports almost always offer fixed-rate transportation via bus, minivan or taxi to downtown or hotel zone areas. Usually there is a booth at the airport where you can purchase a ticket or voucher. You also may have the option of riding in a private taxi (which costs more) or sharing the ride (and paying less). For safety reasons, never hail an unmarked cab outside the terminal.

There are frequent flights to Mexico from such "gateway" cities as Dallas/Fort Worth, Houston, Los Angeles and Miami. A bewildering array of fares, vacation packages and promotions also are available, and it often pays to search for a bargain. AAA/CAA members can obtain fare and schedule information and make reservations through AAA Travel Agencies. When making reservations, be sure you confirm all flights at least 72 hours prior to departure—particularly the return leg of a round trip.

Charter flights, while offering low fares, also are subject to the greatest number of restrictions. The charter operation can cancel a flight up to 10 days before it is scheduled to depart; if you cancel, you may not be able to recoup your money. When considering a charter flight, review the refund policy and contract stipulations carefully. Mexico also charges an airport tax on all departing flights; the nominal fee is normally included in the cost of your airline ticket.

### **Car Rentals**

U.S. rental cars generally cannot be driven across the border. One exception is Hertz, which permits designated vehicles rented at airport facilities in San Diego, Tucson and Yuma; special paperwork is required.

If you're flying into Mexico but plan on taking a side trip from your main destination, renting a car is an easy way to sidestep dealing with unfamiliar local transportation. AAA members can reserve a rental car through their local club; it is highly recommended that you make all necessary arrangements prior to your departure.

Major U.S. franchises are located in the larger cities. There are numerous Mexican companies as well, but although their rates may be less the vehicles also may be less reliable, and available insurance protection should be carefully reviewed. Overall, the cost of renting a car in Mexico is at least, if not more, expensive than in the United States.

U.S. car rental companies require a credit card. Few if any will accept a cash deposit, and if allowed it will be substantial. A U.S. or Canadian driver's license is acceptable. The usual minimum age limit is 25. With Hertz, renters ages 21-24 will incur an age differential charge, and certain restrictions may apply. Special restrictions also may be placed on drivers above a certain age. Extras such as air conditioning or automatic transmission may incur additional costs.

Also take your itinerary into account when deciding how long to rent. While most companies will allow you to rent in one location and drop off at another, the drop-off charge can be guite steep. Request that a copy of the reservation confirmation be mailed to you; this should reduce the chance of overcharging, since the rate will be printed on the confirmation slip.

Inspect the car carefully before you drive off the lot. Check the windshield for cracks; the windshield wipers; the body and fenders for dents, rust, etc.; the head and taillights; the tires for wear and pressure; and note any missing items, such as the gas cap or floor mats. Seat belts and a fire extinguisher are required by law. A thorough inspection is well worth the time, as you will be charged for anything that is perceived damaged or missing.

Mexican automobile insurance is required; it is provided by the rental company and figured into the total cost of the contract. Standard contracts normally offer both liability coverage and collision coverage after payment of a deductible. Accepting an optional Collision Damage Waiver (CDW) will be an additional charge but means that you won't have to pay the deductible (which can be as much as \$5,000) in the event of an accident. Also, if you decline the CDW, some companies will apply an amount equal to 10 percent of the commercial value of the vehicle to your credit card.

It is strongly recommended that if renting a car you check with your personal automobile insurer to confirm that coverage is provided for a rental in Mexico; if not, definitely accept the Loss Damage Waiver option. Driving conditions in some parts of the country make it advisable to have the additional protection provided by the Loss Damage Waiver.

While the extras can add up, they're worth it for peace of mind. In any event, the more coverage you have the better; speed bumps on many Mexican free roads, for example, can cause damage even if negotiated at slow speeds. Look into what your own automobile insurance covers—it might, for example, take care of damages to a rental car.



Keep the rental company's toll-free emergency number handy in case you run into trouble on the road. And when you return the vehicle, remember to fill the gas tank; the refueling charge will be much more expensive than any pump.

### **Arriving By Personal Vehicle**

If you're driving into Mexico, a little advance preparation can prevent crossing the border from becoming a lengthy process. Both a government-issued temporary vehicle importation permit and a promise to return vehicle form are required for travel beyond 20 to 30 kilometers (12 to 19 miles, depending on the Mexican state) of the mainland border.

Bring the original and two copies of your current vehicle license/registration receipt to present at the point of entry, as officials may insist on seeing the original. Keep the original in a separate safe place while you are in Mexico and keep the copies with the temporary vehicle importation permit and the promise to return vehicle form. It also isn't a bad idea to bring a copy of the car's title document.

Inspection checkpoints have separate lanes based on what you're bringing into the country. If items do not exceed permitted exemption limits, choose the Nothing to Declare lane; if you're bringing goods worth more than permitted exemption limits, choose the Self Declaration



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lane. If you have nothing to declare, a red light-green light system is used for random inspection/vehicle searches. If the light flashes green you may proceed; if it flashes red your luggage will be routinely inspected.

The "Only Sonora" temporary vehicle permit program allows visitors to Sonora to drive within the state without obtaining the federal temporary vehicle importation permit. Sonora also has a designated "free zone" (west of Mex. 15 and north of Empalme) that includes the popular tourist destinations of Puerto Peñasco (Rocky Point), San Carlos and Bahía Kino. A vehicle permit is not needed to drive to these destinations, although proof of citizenship, an FMM tourist permit, a valid driver's license and proof of vehicle ownership are.

If you're driving a leased or company-owned vehicle, a notarized letter of authorization (printed on stationery showing the company's or leasing agency's letterhead) that allows you to take the vehicle out of the United States or Canada and into Mexico is required, and an employee ID card must be presented. If the vehicle is not fully paid for, a notarized letter from the lienholder authorizing use of the vehicle in Mexico for a specified period must be presented.

Rented vehicles require a rental agreement and a notarized affidavit from the rental car company stating the company's permission to bring the car into Mexico. The same name must appear on the rental agreement and on the temporary vehicle importation permit.

When you pay the temporary importation administrative fee a guarantee must be signed on your credit card; this gives the Mexican government authority to track down the owner or driver if the vehicle is left behind. If a fine is incurred, it may be charged against the credit card. Should your vehicle become incapacitated, arrangements to leave without it can be made through the U.S. Embassy or one of its consulates, or through a Mexican customs (Aduana) office.

If you do not have or do not wish to use a major credit card to pay the administrative fee, a bond—based on the value of the vehicle—must be posted with a Mexican bonding firm (Afianzadora) at the point of entry. This is a costly procedure that involves much paperwork; fees range from \$200-\$400, depending on the vehicle's make and model year.

For the temporary importation of two vehicles at least two persons must travel as tourists, and separate permits must be obtained for each vehicle. For example, one individual will not be allowed with both a car and a motorcycle, even if he or she owns both vehicles. One of the vehicles must be registered to another qualified driver in the same party, or a second person can obtain a permit for the additional vehicle by presenting a notarized affidavit of permission from the owner.

It is not mandatory for a group of people arriving in Mexico in the same vehicle to leave in the same vehicle; however, the individual who obtained and filled out the temporary vehicle importation permit must leave the country in the same vehicle in which he or she arrived. The vehicle may be driven by the importer's spouse or adult children, as long as they have the same immigration status; other persons may drive the vehicle as long as the owner is in it. Drivers regularly crossing and recrossing the border do not need to obtain a new temporary vehicle importation permit with each crossing as long as the initial permit is still valid.

The temporary importation regulations for automobiles also apply to recreational vehicles. Equipment and luggage should be packed to permit easy customs inspection. Vehicles exceeding 3.5 metric tons in weight require a special permit.

Trailers and motor homes can only remain in Mexico 6 months unless they are left in bond at an authorized trailer park. These parks have placed a bond with a Mexican customs office and are responsible for the storage of the recreational vehicle.

The Mexican government does not provide facilities for storing an automobile if you must suddenly leave the country due to emergency. It can, however, be left for up to 10 days after the temporary importation permit expiration date, provided that you apply for a Retorno Seguro permit at a Mexican customs office.

Hacienda (the Mexican Treasury Department) has the authority to confiscate any vehicle that has been illegally imported into the country. Hacienda also has the authority to confiscate a vehicle whose owner (or driver) cannot produce the proper temporary vehicle importation documentation. It also is illegal for a foreigner to sell a motor vehicle in Mexico.

For additional information about temporary vehicle importation procedures see the Border Information section in the back of this guide.

### **Automobile Insurance**

U.S. automobile insurance is *not* valid in Mexico. While some American companies may extend their coverage a certain number of miles from the border or number of days in Mexico, only a Mexico tourist automobile insurance policy is acceptable as evidence of financial responsibility if you have an accident in that country.

Arrange for a policy with full coverage issued through a reliable Mexican insurance company with complete adjusting facilities in cities throughout the country. AAA offices in border states. Nevada and Utah can provide Mexico automobile insurance to members.

To obtain Mexico insurance, you will need to provide the following: current vehicle title or registration, a valid U.S. or Canadian driver's license, and proof that you currently have U.S. or Canadian automobile insurance (the policy's declaration sheet lists all coverages). Phone ahead to determine what additional specific information (vehicle identification number, included accessories, etc.) is needed so that the policy can be accurately written.

The Mexican government has no minimum requirement for insurance; the agent will help you obtain the coverage best suiting your needs. If you obtain Mexico insurance through a AAA club office the policy will be written by the day, with a discount for more than 30 days' coverage, and will be issued immediately upon application. Towed vehicles *must* be identified in the policy; if not, the policy can be declared void.

Select Hertz locations in Southern California, Arizona, New Mexico and Texas allow customers to drive designated vehicles up to 250 miles south of the U.S./Mexico border. Members planning to drive a Hertz vehicle into Mexico must purchase a Mexico auto insurance policy directly from Hertz.

If the vehicle is leased or not owned by you, a notarized letter from the leasing company or the registered owner giving you permission to take the vehicle into Mexico must be provided, and must include the vehicle identification number and the dates of your entry into and departure from Mexico.

Unlike the prevailing tenet of U.S. and Canadian law, Mexican law is based on the Napoleonic Code, which presumes guilt until innocence is proven. As a result, all parties (operators of vehicles, but in some cases even passengers) involved in an accident in Mexico are detained for assessing responsibility. If the accident involves no personal injury, the drivers may be asked to go with the attending officer to the police station to complete the necessary accident report, and the vehicles will usually be impounded for investigation. Once blame is established, the negligent driver's vehicle will remain impounded until he or she pays the damages.

If the accident causes injury or death, the operators will be jailed until the authorities determine who was at fault. Then only the responsible driver will remain incarcerated until he or she guarantees restitution to the victims and payment of the fine imposed for causing the accident (under Mexican law an automobile accident is a criminal offense).

A Mexican insurance policy is recognized by the authorities as a guarantee of proper payment for damages according to the terms of the policy. When presented, it can significantly reduce red tape and help to bring about an early release. However, a Mexican insurance policy may not prevent a motorist from actually being detained if he or she is involved in an accident that results in injury or death.

If an accident in which a driver is at fault results in damage to government property, such as road signs, safety fences, light or telephone poles, toll stations, street pavement or sidewalks, he or she must pay for the repairs needed even if no other vehicle was involved or no injury or death occurred.

All accidents or claims *must* be reported before leaving Mexico. If you need assistance with a claim, you should obtain it *only* from an authorized agent or adjuster of the insurance company that issued the policy. Official release papers should be kept as evidence that the case is closed, especially if the car shows obvious damage from the accident.

Rates are based on the current value of the vehicle; towed vehicles are covered separately on the same policy as the towing vehicle. Policies are written in both English and Spanish. In the event of a disagreement, the Spanish text will prevail. Read your policy carefully before entering Mexico to discern what is and isn't covered. Some companies, for example, do not include lawyer's fees or bail to defend the policyholder against criminal charges, although adjusters in the larger cities may keep lawyers on a retainer who will act on behalf of the insured free of charge.

A separate policy may be required to pay for translating and notarizing a driver's license or other documents. A separate policy also may be required to cover personal accident insurance, baggage insurance and medical coverage.

### For Assistance

Ask at your hotel desk or consular office for the name and address of the nearest hospital and English-speaking doctor. Several Mexican and U.S. companies offer medical evacuation service by air; the U.S. Embassy in Mexico City provides a list of these firms. Tourist publications often print names and addresses of local hospitals. Most Mexican cities and towns also have a Red Cross (Cruz Roja) facility.

Assistance often is provided by Tourist Assistance (*Protección al Turista*). Offices are in Ensenada, Mexicali, Rosarito, San Felipe, Tecate and Tijuana on the Baja California Peninsula and in the capital of each state on the mainland, normally in the same building that houses the State Tourism Office. The U.S. Embassy and Mexican consulate offices in the United States and Canada can provide lists of attorneys who speak English. Federal Consumer Protection Agency (*Procuraduría Federal del Consumidor*) offices are in all state capitals and other major cities.

If detained or arrested, by international law you have the right to call a consular officer. The long distance access code for the United States and Canada from within Mexico is 95 (station to station). For Mexico from within the country the code is 91. To make a direct international call to the United States or Canada from within Mexico,

dial 001 before the area code and phone number; to call long distance from one Mexican destination to another, dial 01 before the area code and phone number.

### **State Department Services**

The U.S. State Department's Office of Overseas Citizens Services office deals with such situations as notifying home if you are caught in a natural disaster or political disturbance, locating someone in the event of an emergency, delivering emergency messages, making emergency money transfers and providing emergency loans. The Office of Children's Issues handles international child abduction cases. To reach either office, phone (888) 407-4747 (from the United States) or (202) 501-4444 (within Mexico).

Should you lose your money or other financial resources while in Mexico, the U.S. Embassy in Mexico City can help you contact your family, bank or employer to arrange for the transfer of funds. To transfer funds commercially to Mexico, contacts in the United States should go to the nearest Western Union office and have money sent to an "Elektra" store in Mexico. The funds should be sent in care of your name, either *Dinero en Minutos* (Money in Minutes) or *Va a Llamar* (Will Call). The embassy's website provides information (link to "Financial Assistance").

### Mexico's Highways

Roads in Mexico are generally not marked as clearly as those in the United States. Signs for turns and route directions sometimes consist of city or town names only. Route numbers are normally posted every 5 kilometers (3 miles) on small roadside markers, but these also can be few and far between.

Each Mexican state is responsible for the maintenance of its roads, and some are better kept than others. Weather conditions, especially heavy rains, as well as mud or rockslides keep some roadways in a constant state of disrepair. Lanes on nontoll roads tend to be narrow, and shoulders are either narrow or nonexistent.

Adventurous travelers who plan to drive little-used or unpaved roads should inquire locally about conditions before heading out. Even a good map may not be accurate regarding the condition of unpaved or ungraded routes; deep sand "roads" can stall even a four-wheel-drive vehicle, and seasonal downpours can render unpaved roads impassable. Put a protective covering over your luggage to keep out dust, and store camera equipment in plastic bags.

Do not expect most free roads in Mexico to compare to the interstate highway system in the United States. Following the dictates of mountainous terrain, these roadways are mostly rolling or winding, although there are many straight and/or level stretches in northern Mexico and the Yucatán Peninsula. Some of them have a sandpaper texture that affords better traction on curves but is wearing on tires.

Try not to drive after dark if at all possible. Few roads aside from toll highways are equipped with street lights, and night visibility is poor. Vehicles are sometimes driven with no headlights, and potholes become invisible after dark. Bicyclists—on bikes without lights or reflectors—and pedestrians commonly use the roads at night. If you intend to cover a certain distance during any one day, get an early start and estimate your total driving time on the side of caution. Never pull off the road to sleep.

Livestock-mainly cattle, goats and donkeys-may unexpectedly appear on rural roadways at night and even during the day; slow down and give them a wide berth. Animals will be almost invisible on unlighted roads at night, and can cause tremendous damage to your vehicle if they are struck.

Drive defensively and always be alert to road conditions and other motorists. Bus, truck and other drivers who are familiar with local routes will drive faster and negotiate maneuvers more boldly than tourists on roads that are narrow, winding and weathered. Note: Using a cellphone while driving is a traffic violation in Mexico.

Truckers in particular may drive aggressively or inconsiderately. If a truck begins to pass on a two-lane road, be prepared to pull off onto the gravel or graded dirt flanking the road surface if necessary to give the truck adequate room. Exercise caution; along the sides of roadways without shoulders there often is a full or partial covering of brush or undergrowth. Be particularly careful if you are attempting to pass a slow-moving truck—the driver isn't likely to pull over to give you more maneuvering room. Also be on the lookout for vehicles that are temporarily stopped in the roadway, particularly in rural areas.

At intersections with a left-turn lane there usually is a separate left-turn arrow; to turn left legally you must wait for the arrow. If making a left turn off a two-lane roadway where there is no separate left-turn lane, you are expected to pull over to the right as far as possible and wait for traffic to clear before making the turn. A right turn on red is generally not permitted unless there is a sign giving permission to do so; use your best judgment in situations when it is unclear whether you can legally turn right on red.

On two-lane roadways with paved shoulders, a solid white line runs along the right edge of each lane; this is an indication that drivers normally should not cross over to the right of this line onto the shoulder. In many instances, however, that solid line is now a dashed white line, which means that if you see a vehicle approaching you while passing a vehicle in the oncoming lane, you are required to move to the right of the dashed line onto the road shoulder while proceeding, giving the driver of the passing vehicle enough space to complete the maneuver. The driver of the vehicle being passed is supposed to move to his or her right as well. This essentially opens up the center of the roadway for safe passing maneuvers. This system works quite well once you realize why an approaching car appears to be heading straight at you.

Speed bumps (topes) and potholes (baches) constitute perhaps the greatest danger to motorists on Mexican

### AAA DIAMONDS ARE NOW INSPECTED CLEAN

AAA Inspectors visit hotels and lodgings throughout the year. The Inspected Clean designation will be added to the Diamond badge as properties pass their ATP inspection.



Please refer to pages 10-11 for Inspected Clean details.

highways. Speed bumps are at the entrance to almost every town, no matter how small, and also can be encountered within towns. Warning signs will say *Topes, Vibradores* or *Reductor de Velocidad* (speed reducer) and give the distance in meters. Instead of words, some signs show a picture symbol and the distance in meters. In small towns these signs can appear suddenly, and not just at the entrance to town. Some speed bumps may not be preceded by a warning sign, however.

Topes are raised cobblestone bumps that can damage the underside of a vehicle unless negotiated at a very slow speed. Vibradores are corrugated, both lower and wider than topes. Speed bumps are prohibited on open sections of road and on toll roads, except at the entrance to toll stations.

Potholes are a particular problem along older nontoll roadways and are exacerbated in areas that have a summer rainy season. Short-term maintenance may be nothing more than filling the pothole with sand or dirt, and some can be large enough to swallow a tire.

In the downtown sections of larger cities there are likely to be a number of one-way streets. Instead of signs, small arrows on the side of buildings or on lampposts often indicate traffic direction. Follow the flow; if in doubt as to whether you are driving in the right direction, note which way parked vehicles are facing.

### **Toll Roads**

Most newer highways in Mexico are toll roads (auto-pistas). Comparable in quality to U.S. highways, these roads are safe and often scenic, and some are all but deserted because Mexicans can't afford to drive them.

Toll roads are designated on signs by the word *cuota* (and also by the letter "D" following the route number), nontoll roads by *via libre* (free road). There is usually a free alternative route to toll routes. *Libramiento* indicates a route that bypasses city centers or smaller towns. These bypasses, which sometimes are part of the toll route, save time otherwise spent on negotiating congested areas.

Individual tollbooth (plaza de cobro) fees vary. Most booths near the U.S. border and in the vicinity of popular tourist resorts, such as Cancún and Cabo San Lucas, accept dollars in addition to pesos. To be on the safe side, however, carry more than enough pesos to cover all toll fees regardless of your route. You will receive a receipt in return for payment, which also acts as an insurance certificate to avoid paying road repair charges if you are involved in an accident.

Following are some major toll routes:

**Mex. 1-D** (Tijuana to Ensenada): Runs about 114 kilometers (71 miles) south from the U.S. border to Ensenada in the state of Baja California.

Mex. 2-D (Tijuana to Mexicali): Runs east-west along the U.S. border in the state of Baja California.

**Mex. 15-D** (Nogales to Mazatlán): Runs about 1,212 kilometers (727 miles) from the U.S. border south to Mazatlán through the states of Sonora and Sinaloa.

**Mex. 15-D** (Tepic to Guadalajara): Runs about 228 kilometers (137 miles) southeast through the states of Nayarit and Jalisco.

**Mex. 15-D** (Guadalajara to Mexico City): Runs about 668 kilometers (401 miles) southeast through the states of Jalisco, Michoacán and México.

**Mex. 40-D** (Durango to Mazatlán): Runs about 225 kilometers (140 miles) southwest through the states of Durango and Sinaloa.

**Mex. 57-D** (Mexico City to Querétaro): Runs about 210 kilometers (126 miles) northwest from Mexico City through the states of México and Querétaro.

**Mex. 85-D** (Nuevo Laredo to Monterrey): Runs about 235 kilometers (141 miles) south from the U.S. border through the state of Nuevo León.

**Mex. 55-D/95-D** (Mexico City to Acapulco): Runs about 415 kilometers (257 miles) south from Mexico City via Cuernavaca to Acapulco (states of Morelos and Guerrero).

Mex. 180-D (Mérida to Cancún): Runs about 242 kilometers (145 miles) from the junction with Mex. 180 east to the junction with Mex. 307 through the states of Yucatán and Quintana Roo.

**Arco Norte:** (Querétaro to Puebla): Runs about 223 kilometers (138 miles) from just outside Querétaro to just north of Cholula (near Puebla), bypassing the Mexico City metropolitan area to the east.

### Gasoline, Oil and Repairs

In 2016 Mexico's energy markets were opened to foreign competition and investment; privately owned gas stations now operate in Mexico including G5000, Mobil and Shell. In addition, fuel prices are no longer fixed by the government.

All Pemex stations are full service. To avoid being overcharged, a practice that targets foreign motorists in particular, you'll need to be vigilant. Make sure the pump has been turned back to zero before the attendant begins filling your tank, know exactly how many gallons/liters your tank holds, and watch closely until the nozzle is pulled out and replaced on the pump to make certain you are being charged the correct amount. Tipping is customary for additional services like windshield cleaning; a few pesos is fine.

**Note:** It's best to have the gas attendant run your credit card and get approval for a fixed amount before pumping the gas.

Stations with a "GasoPLUS" sign accept credit cards of the same name for gasoline purchases, but otherwise expect to pay cash. Stations close to the U.S. border and in major tourist areas like the Riviera Maya may accept U.S. dollars, but most charge in Mexican currency. It's a good idea to keep smaller denominations of pesos on hand for change transactions. Although stations on major routes are spaced at adequate intervals, always make sure your gas tank is at least half full.

Most Pemex stations sell two grades of unleaded (sin plomo) gas. "Magna," dispensed from green pump handles, is the cheaper of the two; the "Premium" grade is dispensed from red pump handles. Pemex stations no longer offer Nova (leaded) gas, although diesel fuel is available.

Fuel quality is comparable to U.S. unleaded grades. Pumps in Mexico register liters, not gallons; 10 liters is equal to about 2.5 gallons. In fall 2021, a liter of regular Magna cost 20-22 pesos; a liter of premium, 22-23 pesos; a liter of diesel, 21-22 pesos. Gas prices in the northern border region are on par with U.S. prices, and there are also regional differences as well as frequent fluctuations in the price. Since unleaded pump nozzles in Mexico are sometimes larger than those in the United States, it's a good idea to keep a funnel in the car.

Service stations and private garages carry oils made in Mexico by foreign companies and by Pemex. Its brand, Brio, comes in several grades indicated by the color of the can; gold, black and blue are the best.

Propane gas is obtainable by vacationers traveling in recreational vehicles more than 50 kilometers (30 miles) south of the U.S. border. This policy ensures that tourists who use propane for their engines, stoves and heaters will have an adequate supply.

If your vehicle requires routine maintenance or major repairs while on the road, automotive repair shops are identified by a sign that says taller mecánico. Fluent Spanish is almost always necessary when negotiating with a mechanic, and it might be difficult finding someone familiar with your car's make and model. If a part must be ordered there could be additional expense and long delays, as permission from Mexican customs is needed to import parts. Also keep in mind that some businesses in Mexico still close from around 2-4 p.m. for the traditional siesta.

### The Green Angels

### **Road Signs**

Road signs are in Spanish, but there are also signs depicting international picture symbols. Via Corta indicates a short or alternate route. Right turns on red are prohibited unless a sign is marked Continua. Retorno means a U-turn is permitted. Signs often posted at the entrance to

small towns show the maximum speed limit or say Poblado Proximo (upcoming town) or Disminuya su Velocidad (reduce your speed).

Common signs along highways include Arbochate el Cinturon (Buckle Your Seat Belt) and No Deje Piedras Sobre el Pavimento (Don't Leave Stones on the Pavement); the latter refers to the common practice of placing rocks in the road to denote a hazard or disabled vehicle. Some intersections without traffic signals have signs that say Ceda el Paso a un Vehiculo (Cede the Right of Way to One Vehicle); they are posted on each intersecting road and indicate that one vehicle at a time may proceed.

Bridges with signs marked Un Solo Carril or Puente Angosto are narrow, one-way bridges. When two cars approach such a bridge from opposite directions, the first driver to flick his or her headlights has the right-of-way. The other should pull to the side of the road, allowing the first driver to cross. Although not a regulation, it is a general practice.

Many traffic lights are positioned horizontally rather than vertically, and on some signals the green light flashes three times before the yellow light appears. Motorists stopped at red lights in cities will often be approached by people attempting to earn money by washing windshields. If you're not interested, mouth the words "no tengo" dinero" or shake your head "no" and rub your thumb and index finger together—the international symbol for "I have no monev."

### **Parking**

If possible, schedule daily activities so that your car does not have to remain unattended for any length of time. Heed "no parking" signs, which depict a red circle with a diagonal red line across a capital "E." Illegally parked cars will be towed, or their license plates will be removed. Recovering either item can result in a nightmare of time, expense and frustration. If in doubt, park in a guarded lot rather than on the street. Never leave valuables in plain sight in a parked vehicle.

On a one-way street, make certain your vehicle is parked on the left side, not the right. Parking on the street also likely means being approached by a youngster who will offer to watch your vehicle while you're gone. This often is a good idea, since the couple of pesos you hand over are a small price to pay for peace of mind. If a group of boys appears on your return, however, pay only one.

### Law Enforcement

On main highways the speed limit is generally about 100 km/h (60 mph) or as posted. In many cities the limit is about 40 km/h (25 mph); in some small towns it may be as low as 30 km/h (18-20 mph). Always obey the speed



limit; while local police are generally lenient toward tourists who commit minor traffic violations, they make an exception in the case of speeding.

In Mexico City and those parts of the state of Mexico falling within the greater metropolitan area (particularly north and east of the City of Mexico), motorists with foreign license plates may be stopped by police for alleged driving infractions. If you committed a violation and recognize it, accept the *boleta de infracción* (ticket) without arguing.

If you are stopped and did not do anything wrong, however, do not give in to a demand for graft. Write down the officer's identification number and ask to speak with his *jefe* (HEH-feh), or boss, or to be taken to the nearest delegación de policía (police station) to explain your side of the situation. In Mexico City, the Secretaría de Turismo (the Ministry of Tourism, or SECTUR) may be able to provide assistance if you feel you have been unfairly accused of a traffic violation; phone (55) 5250-0123. From elsewhere within Mexico, phone 01 (800) 008-9090 (toll-free long distance), or get in touch with the nearest State Tourism Office.

### **Bus Service**

Mexican bus lines offer frequent express service from U.S. border points to most cities, and also between major Mexican cities. Among the major lines are ABC, Autobuses de Oriente (ADO), Enlaces Terrestres Nacionales (ETN), Omnibus de Mexico and Estrella Blanca.

Most of these companies offer "executive class" service that is comparable in quality to first-class U.S. bus service. Amenities and extras include air conditioning, reclining seats, restrooms, movies, free snacks and beverages, and controlled 95 km/h (60 mph) speed. Some also offer Wi-Fi. Executive class buses make few sometimes no-stops and carry fewer passengers. Firstclass buses offer similar amenities, although the seating configuration is usually not as commodious.

Seats are usually reserved in advance. For long trips, bring your own food—in case you don't want to eat in the restaurant where the bus stops—drinking water and a roll of toilet paper just in case. Even though executive and first-class buses use toll highways and are thus less likely to encounter incidents of robbery or assault, travel only during the day and avoid overnight trips.

You can hail a second-class bus just about anywhere simply by standing at the side of the road and waving, and they're certainly a great way to experience local life. However, these buses often make a number of stops, are usually not air conditioned, and you may have to share your seat with a pig or chicken. Furthermore, they cost only slightly less than executive or first-class buses, and without the convenience of making advance reservations.

Many Mexican cities have one central bus station (Central Camionera or Central de Autobuses), which may or may not be near the main plaza or center of town. The various bus lines have offices at the central station. In some cities several stations in different locations serve specific companies or destinations. If you're unsure where to go, ask for the estación del autobús and give your destination.

For trips between major cities, purchase a reservedseat, round-trip ticket from the station in advance; this is imperative for long weekends and around school holidays, holiday seasons and major annual events. You can search for available seats as well as reserve and pay for tickets on bus line websites.

Routes, fares and departure times are always subject to change, and the best way to obtain this information is directly from the station. A knowledge of basic Spanish is essential; it also helps to write down your destination and any other particulars and show the information to the ticketing agent to make certain you're getting on the right bus. Schedules usually indicate whether the bus is local or de paso (which means it is en route from another location). Directo or expresso indicate a nonstop route. Salida means departure; *llegada*, arrival.

Taxis, although more expensive, are a safer mode of intown transportation than local buses. Exceptions are buses that travel specifically to tourist attractions; while these may be slow, they allow you to relax and enjoy the scenery.

Greyhound Lines Inc. can ticket passengers to most U.S. border cities; once across the border you need to make arrangements with a Mexican bus line. Often there are buses that shuttle between stations on both sides of the border. From Mexico City, bus trips to destinations throughout the country are easily arranged; the major bus lines operate out of four huge terminals located in the northern, southern, eastern and western sections of the city.

Another option to using buses as your main means of on-the-road transportation is to take a guided motor coach tour. Such U.S. companies as Gray Line Tours offer transborder bus excursions that last from several hours to several days. Contact a travel agency for details.

### Ferry Service

Passenger and vehicle ferry service is provided between the Mexican mainland and Baja California, connecting the ports of Santa Rosalía-Guaymas, La Paz-Topolobampo (Los Mochis) and La Paz-Mazatlán. Advance reservations are required and can be made by phone as well as in person at one of the ferry offices. As a knowledge of fluent Spanish is necessary, it's easier to make reservations through a local travel agency at the port of departure. The Baja Ferries website provides fare and schedule information in English.

Fares are one way and per person, sharing the accommodation. Salon seats, the least expensive, are airplanetype seats. Cabina, cabin lodging with restroom facilities, also is available but is more expensive. Children ages 3-11 are charged half the adult fare. If you're prone to seasickness, bring the appropriate medications. Pregnant women are not allowed onboard. If transporting a vehicle, take everything you'll need out of it before the journey begins.

Note: If you plan on transporting a vehicle from Baja California to the Mexican mainland, it is necessary to obtain a temporary vehicle importation permit. To avoid frustration and disrupted travel plans, obtain the permit and have all related temporary vehicle importation documents completed at the border before entering Mexico. When applying for a vehicle permit, proof of citizenship, a copy of the current registration and a notarized letter of permission from the lienholder (if a vehicle is not fully paid for) all must be presented for each vehicle being transported (including motorcycles).

Your vehicle must be weighed before you purchase your ferry ticket. Arrive at the ticket office as soon as possible (check in advance; opening times vary from location to location), and inquire where to park your vehicle for weighing (la balanza). Passenger and vehicle tickets are usually sold in separate lines. Also keep in mind that if you have entered Mexico via Baja California and then cross over to the mainland, you will have to go through customs before boarding the ferry and pay whatever duty fees are assessed.

### Health and Safety

Taking reasonable precautions should eliminate serious health risks for almost all foreign visitors. First and foremost: Don't eat anything that you haven't peeled yourself, or that cannot be cooked or boiled. This rule applies primarily to fruits, vegetables and seafood. Avoid unpasteurized dairy products as well. Unless you're used to it, it's best to avoid food sold by street vendors, but at restaurants in cities where tourism is big business, virtually anything on the menu can be enjoyed without fear.

Bottled water in liter or smaller sizes is sold throughout Mexico at gas station convenience stores, grocery stores and shops catering to tourists. Chemical disinfecting tablets also are available from pharmacies and supermarkets.

If the hotel has its own purification system, tap water can be used for brushing your teeth or rinsing contact lenses; ask to make sure, and also ask about the ice dispensed by ice machines. Most hotels routinely provide bottled water for drinking (some may charge for it when you check out). If in doubt about the water in smaller towns, ask for bottled water. Remember that this includes ice cubes. If you're in an area where bottled water is not available, boil water vigorously for one full minute to kill disease-causing organisms.

These precautions should serve to ward off the most common visitor ailment, diarrhea (commonly called turista). Bed rest and a liquid diet—unsweetened tea is best-will cure most cases. If these measures fail, see a doctor; there are physicians, surgeons, specialists, good hospitals and Mexican Red Cross clinics in all major cities and larger towns. In many villages, visitors can go to a clinic or hospital run by the Instituto Mexicano del Seguro Social (IMSS), the Instituto de Seguridad y Servicios Sociales de los Trabajadores del Estado (ISSSTE) or the Secretaría de Salud.

Many large hotels have an in-house doctor; if not, the manager or local police authorities can help you obtain medical assistance. Keep in mind that it's not a good idea to buy over-the-counter antibiotics.

### Visiting High-Altitude Areas

If you live in or are used to a lower altitude, you may need a short adjustment period when visiting areas at elevations above 1,525 meters (5,000 feet). Don't push yourself too hard; a light diet and reduced intake of alcoholic beverages are recommended. Go slowly for the first few days. If you experience a headache or nausea, rest until you feel comfortable. Another health consideration at high altitudes is overexposure to the sun; wear a hat and/or apply suntan lotion that has an effective sunscreen agent.

The elderly or those with heart conditions should consult their physician before visiting cities at high elevations. Travelers with specific health concerns should check into recommended immunizations or medications to take with them.

Acute Mountain Sickness (AMS), which can strike at altitudes of 2,450 meters (8,000 feet) or more, is the body's way of coping with reduced oxygen and humidity. Also known as altitude sickness, its symptoms include headaches, double vision, shortness of breath, loss of appetite, insomnia and lethargy. Some people complain of temporary weight gain or swelling in the face, hands and feet. Even those used to high altitudes may feel the effects of AMS. If symptoms strike, stop ascending. A quick descent will alleviate the discomfort.

The negative reaction of your body to changes in altitude is lessened if you're in good physical shape and don't smoke. Ascend gradually, eat light but nutritious meals and drink plenty of bottled water. Alcohol consumption may aggravate AMS symptoms if they occur.

**Note:** The elevation for city and place descriptions in this guide is included if it is over 762 meters (2,500 feet).

### **Diseases**

The risk of contracting typhoid or cholera is minimal, despite sporadic cholera outbreaks. Vaccinations will offer



protection in areas off the tourist itinerary, where running water and drainage systems frequently are inadequate, but vaccinations should not be considered a substitute for caution when it comes to food and beverages. In the case of cholera or other intestinal ailments, this means avoiding raw or undercooked seafood and cold seafood dishes.

The presence of mosquitoes that transmit the Zika virus is dependent on such local conditions as weather, altitude, mosquito control efforts and the overall prevalence of disease. Mosquitoes also can spread dengue fever and malaria. They seldom live at elevations above 6,500 feet; the risk of being bitten is greater in coastal areas. Use mosquito repellent if you plan on visiting beaches or spending time outdoors. Brands containing DEET are the most effective; be sure to read and follow the directions and precautions on the label. Try to avoid being outside between dusk and dawn, when mosquitoes are most likely to bite.

Tourists arriving in Mexico from yellow fever-infected areas must have a yellow fever vaccination certificate; tourists arriving directly from the United States or Canada are not required to have the certificate.

The CDC operates a hotline with international health reguirements and recommendations for foreign travelers. Topics include general vaccinations, food and water guidelines and current disease-outbreak reports. Phone (800) 232-4636 for the immunization hotline.

### Personal Safety

Becoming a victim of crime is unlikely, but the possibility does exist. Cities that are centers of activity for Mexican drug cartels receive most of the negative publicity. Although not directed at tourists, the ongoing violence continues to generate news headlines and adversely affects the daily lives of many Mexicans.

The most hard-hit region is northern Mexico and the northern border cities. Foreign visitors are also vulnerable in the Mexico City metropolitan area, where more than 20 million people are crammed together. Violence occurs regularly in the states of Guerrero and Michoacán, mostly in rural areas where vigilante groups combat the cartels, resulting in more violence and many innocent "collateral" victims. Tourist resorts like Acapulco and Mazatlán are affected as well.

Politically motivated violence, again not directed at foreigners, occurs from time to time, especially in southern Mexico. And tourist hot spots like Cancún and Los Cabos that are considered safe also are not immune from hotel room thefts, purse snatchings and pickpockets.

For visitors on vacation, good old common sense is the key to staying out of harm's way. In particular, it helps to look and act confident rather than bewildered when out in public. Don't flaunt expensive watches, jewelry or clothing; you're more likely to be targeted for robbery or assault if you appear well-off or wealthy.

Avoid putting your wallet in a back pocket or wearing a purse with a shoulder strap that can be grabbed by a passerby. Petty thieves and pickpockets often use a razor to slash pockets or bags, so keep your belongings close to you at all times. Put cameras in briefcases or bags with a chain-reinforced strap.

Always carry credit cards and cash on your person, never in a backpack, and hide money in different places; for example, in extra pockets sewn inside clothing. Keep photocopies of passports, credit cards and other documents in a separate place from the originals. Be very cautious around ATMs. If possible, use one during the day inside a large commercial facility; avoid nighttime transactions at glass-enclosed street machines.

When planning a day of sightseeing, stay informed. Tense local political situations can sometimes result in rowdy demonstrations. Hotel staff, taxi drivers and tour guides are good sources of information in such instances and can offer practical advice should it be necessary to temporarily steer clear of certain parts of town for any reason.

Never leave valuables in plain view in a car; stow possessions out of sight. Use garages or guarded parking lots whenever possible. Legal parking is designated by a sign showing a red circle with a capital "E" inside; no-parking zones have signs with a diagonal red line through the "E."

Always lock your car, roll up the windows and park in a well-lighted area. Do not drive after dark. To avoid becoming a target for robbery, stick to toll highways wherever possible, and never pull off the road to sleep. If traveling by bus, be especially careful at the station; don't leave your luggage unattended, and lock all items together with a chain or cable if possible.

On free roads you may be stopped at military checkpoints and approached by soldiers, police officers or other official-looking men in uniform who request identification and ask where you are going. This happens primarily if you're headed north toward the U.S. border. Most often these checkpoints are conducting random searches for firearms or drugs.

Be sure to slow down and stop if motioned to do so. Remain calm and polite, cooperate fully and speak as little Spanish as possible (or explain in English that you do not speak Spanish). If asked to hand over your wallet, provide only the proper identification; if necessary, remove all your money first. Get badge numbers and names, and report any irregularities to the U.S. Embassy in Mexico City, the nearest U.S. consular office in Mexico or to a Mexican consulate office upon your return home.

A potentially more dangerous situation involves criminal groups linked to drug cartels that control highways by setting up impromptu checkpoints. They may ask for papers or check trunks, illegally charge motorists to continue passing through their "territory" or, in worst-case scenarios, steal vehicles or abduct passengers. Cartel checkpoints operate along Mex. 2 in the state of Tamaulipas as well as in the states of Chihuahua, Coahuila, Durango, Sinaloa. Guerrero and Michoacán.

Poorly paid police may intimidate foreign motorists into paying "fines" for minor or alleged infractions. This is particularly true in and around Mexico City, where visitors with non-Mexican license plates may become victims of harassment. You could also be charged with an infraction that you are certain you did not commit.

Such an incident can be both frightening and infuriating, but if it happens, try to remain calm. Ask to be shown documentation of the rule you violated. Request to speak with someone of higher authority if necessary, and beware of "plainclothes policemen"; insist on seeing identification.

Very obviously writing down all the details of the incident—name, badge number, the nature of the alleged violation, the exact location where it occurred—may help defuse the situation. Avoid handing over an original driver's license, car rental contract, vehicle registration or any other document; always carry photocopies.

If resistance provokes further trouble, ask for the ticket, pay it at a bank and claim a receipt. To register a complaint, contact the Secretaría de Turismo (the Ministry of Tourism, or SECTUR).

Ethnic or sexual stereotyping is unfortunate, but it can occur. Female travelers who look obviously foreign, or those with fair skin and hair, may attract unsolicited attention. If this happens, the best response is no response. In many cantinas, bars with a macho, often hard-drinking male clientele, female customers are unwelcome.

### Currency

The monetary unit is the peso (its symbol is the dollar sign, or \$). One peso equals 100 centavos. There are 5-centavo, 10-centavo, 20-centavo and 50-centavo coins; peso coins are in denominations of \$1, \$2, \$5, \$10 and \$100. Banknotes are in denominations of 20, 50, 100, 200, 500 and 1,000 pesos. All new banknotes issued by Banco de México are made of synthetic polymer, which gives the bills a longer life. The frequently used 20-peso and 50peso notes have added safety features such as a transparent window.

The 5-, 10- and 20-centavo coins are not often used, but they come in handy as spare change to give to the needy, if you're so inclined. The 50-centavo coin can help facilitate small transactions like bus fares and souvenir purchases at markets. Hang on to smaller denomination banknotes and coins as you accumulate them, or exchange a dollar amount that will yield smaller denominations.

Cash payments for amounts that include centavos are rounded off to the nearest 10 centavos. An item costing 11.52 pesos, therefore, would be rounded off to a cash payment of 11.50 pesos; an item costing 11.56 pesos would be rounded off to a cash payment of 11.60 pesos. Check and credit card payments will show the exact amount and must be paid in that amount. Credit card charges are converted into dollars by the bank issuing the card, usually at a favorable bank rate.

In border cities and some tourist resorts, prices in Mexican currency may carry the abbreviation "m.n." (moneda nacional); prices in American currency, "dlls." (dollars). As a general rule, Mexican establishments rendering services to tourists quote and charge in pesos. In many of Mexico's resort areas, though, U.S. dollars are as readily accepted as pesos—and taxi drivers will gladly take dollars almost anywhere in the country. Information sheets showing pictures of Mexican coins and bills are normally available at airports and border crossings, or appear in tourist publications.

Credit cards should cover almost all hotel, restaurant and store charges, as well as airline tickets for flights within Mexico. Gasoline purchases normally cannot be



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charged unless you have a GasoPLUS credit card—issued only in Mexico—which can be used at Pemex gas stations. Some Pemex stations will accept U.S. credit cards, but have cash on hand just in case.

The best place to exchange dollars for pesos is at a reputable Mexican bank. It pays to find out if your bank has a "sister" bank in Mexico before leaving home (for example, Bank of America partners with Santander Bank in Mexico); you'll avoid service fees entirely or be charged a reduced fee per transaction. The Mexican banks Bancomer and HSBC require you to open an account before any business can be conducted, so inquire about this in advance. Mexican banks also require a copy of your personal identification; some may even ask you to provide the copy yourself.

Another option is to exchange money at home, just in case banks or *casas de cambio* (currency exchange offices) at airports are closed when you arrive. Wells Fargo Bank offers currency exchange at select branches for a fee.

Traveler's checks denominated in pesos can be purchased at banks and currency exchange offices in the United States and cashed at Mexican banks, hotels and casas de cambio. However, finding an establishment willing to cash them these days can be difficult.

Casas de cambio usually offer a better rate of exchange than banks. They often are located next to big hotels in



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cities, or in malls in resort areas. Some currency exchange offices may cash checks issued by all three major U.S. credit card companies (American Express, Mastercard and Visa), while others may not. Some also charge a commission on top of a service fee for transactions, so it's worth the time to find one that does not.

Bills that have marks or other blemishes on them may not be taken. And there's always the possibility that you will be ripped off, especially at airports. Always be very specific about telling the clerk (in Spanish if possible) exactly how many dollars you are exchanging for pesos. If you're traveling with someone, have your companion stand with you at the counter as a witness as you count out your money in front of the clerk.

Currency exchange used to be a standard service at hotel front desks before a federal law went into effect prohibiting hotels from exchanging money. For most travelers finding the best rate boils down to a matter of convenience, since differences are normally minimal and the rate can fluctuate daily. If you're shopping around for the best rate or trying to save pennies a pocket calculator will come in handy.

There are automated teller (cajero automático) machines in major cities and resort areas; most ATMs accept the widely honored Cirrus and PLUS cards. Expect peso denominations in return, and to be charged a hefty service fee by your bank for each transaction. Make all transactions during daylight hours, preferably at machines inside commercial establishments. If you'd rather not use an ATM or don't want to carry around lots of cash, consider investing in a pre-paid Visa or Mastercard prior to your trip.

The threat of purse or wallet snatching is ever present in crowded areas or a busy marketplace. Put money and important documents in separate places, and consider keeping extra currency and jewelry in your hotel room safe. When out in public, ignore remarks from strangers such as "What's that on your shoulder?" or someone yelling "Thief!" in a crowded area—both may be setups used by pickpockets or scam artists to distract your attention or trick you into revealing where you carry your money.

### **Tipping**

The matter of whom, when and how much to tip varies depending on the situation. Waiters, maids, porters and other workers whose wages are low must rely to a great extent on tips for their living. Let your conscience be your guide, and don't hesitate to reward outstanding service or penalize poor service.

Percentages for hotel and restaurant staff are similar to those in the United States and Canada. In restaurants, make sure that a service charge has not already been added onto the bill. Taxi drivers are not usually tipped unless they've performed some special service, such as waiting while a bit of shopping is done. Gas station attendants, however, expect a tip.

Sightseeing tour guides should be tipped. There also are individuals whom you would not normally tip at home but should in Mexico; for example, theater ushers, washroom attendants and parking attendants.

Economic reality makes it necessary for some people to resort to begging as a means of survival. Women or children will ask for coins on the street or outside the town cathedral. Another frequently employed location, particularly in larger cities, is a busy intersection. Here an entire family may gather—washing windshields or even putting on an impromptu performance in costume—in return for small change from motorists stopped at the red light. Whether to give under such circumstances is up to the individual, of course, but considering the very real poverty that is a daily fact of life, any gift will be much appreciated.

Street vendors can be ubiquitous, particularly in the main plazas of towns, at archeological sites and other places where tourists are likely to be, and at beaches where vending is not prohibited. If you do decide to purchase something from a roving vendor, be very discreet; otherwise you will be inundated by insistent hawkers pushing everything from fruit to straw baskets. If you don't intend to buy, firmly communicate your lack of interest.

Young children frequently will offer special services to visitors. Even if it is performed in an unsolicited manner—for example, cleaning your windshield while you're stopped at a red light—compensation is expected. Again, if you are not interested in what a child is offering, whether it be carrying your bags at the airport or promising to guard your car while you shop or see the sights, be very firm about declining.

Youngsters also will charm coins or other gifts out of visitors, and it may be hard to resist these overtures. If you do succumb, hand something directly to a child. Children have been killed running across busy streets to pick up "gifts" tossed from car windows. Better yet, buy some pieces of fruit or other inexpensive foods at the local market. A few clothing items, pencils, pens or simple toys can be packed along with your own personal belongings if you enjoy giving such items to the needy.

### Mail Service

All letter mail to Mexico travels by air. First class mail service from Mexico to other countries is by air; parcel post and second class mail is by land. If you want to send mail from Mexico, use post mail only in those cities with airline service. Note: Mail service is notoriously slow, and mail can take up to a month to reach destinations in the United States, even when marked "via air mail." Do not expect postcards, letters or packages to arrive back home before you do.

Postal codes in Mexican addresses should be placed before the name of the destination town or city, as in the following example: Hotel Imperial, Avenida Guadalupe #210, 45040 Guadalajara, Jal., Mexico.

### Addresses

If you've ever had difficulty hunting down an address in almost any large city in the United States, prepare for the same possibility in Mexico. Street names often change on either side of a town's main square, or capriciously after several blocks. Street signs may be outdated or nonexistent. Addresses frequently do not include numbers. All of this can be frustrating if trying to locate an out-of-the-way shop or restaurant, but there are some general guidelines that can be relied on to aid in the search.

Although used in this guide if known for purposes of clarification, designations such as avenida and calle often are not present on signs, and streets are referred to by name only. That name may include a compass direction— Nte. or Norte, Sur, Pte. or Poniente and Ote. or Oriente for north, south, east and west, respectively.

When an address includes *s/n* it means there is no number. In numbered addresses, the number follows rather than precedes the name. Addresses on main routes outside of cities or towns will often be stated in terms of the number of kilometers from town; for example, Km. 18 a Mérida.

Sprawling urban areas (Guadalajara and Monterrey, for example) have their own inscrutable logic regarding street names and configurations, and trying to find something outside of well-known tourist areas can turn into an adventure. Mexico City in particular has a bewildering maze of thoroughfares, and existing streets are often renamed.

Streets in smaller cities are usually laid out in a simple grid pattern radiating from the central plaza. Specific locations within the core downtown area can thus be pinpointed relatively easily in terms of the number of blocks north, south, east or west of the plaza.

If you become lost in an unfamiliar city or town, asking a local taxi driver for directions or having him lead you where you want to go can save a lot of headaches. A knowledge of Spanish is helpful in these situations, and agree on a price first if he transports you anywhere.

If you need to ask directions from someone on the street, keep questions brief and to the point, and ask them with a smile; most people will be happy to try and help. Women who were brought up not to talk to strangers may ignore you, and don't bother asking a child, particularly if your Spanish is rusty. Maps are not likely to be understood; pointing is more direct. If you ask how long it will take to reach a specific destination, or what the exact distance is, the answer will more than likely be subjective.

### Phone Service

To call Mexico from the United States and Canada, dial 011 (the international access code), then 52 (the country code), then the area code and local phone number. For credit card and operator-assisted calls, dial 0152, then the area code and local phone number.

When calling long distance from one Mexican location to another, dial 01 (the access code), then the three-digit area code (two-digit area code in metropolitan Guadalajara, Mexico City and Monterrey), then the seven-digit local phone number (eight-digit local number in metropolitan Guadalajara, Mexico City and Monterrey). Mexican phone numbers shown in this guide include only the 10-digit format (area code plus the local number), not the access code that also must be dialed if making a longdistance call. Local calls in Mexico do not require dialing the access or area codes.

All Mexican toll-free numbers have an 800 area code. You must first dial the 01 access code, then the 800 prefix and the seven-digit number. Note: Mexican phone numbers with an 800 prefix, such as the tourist information national hotline number 01 (800) 008-9090, will work only if you are in Mexico; the call will not go through if dialed from outside the country.

Phone numbers for hotels, restaurants, attractions, travel agencies and airlines, as well as emergency and general information numbers, often are listed in free tourist publications.

Keep three things in mind regarding phone calls. First, they can be quite expensive if made from a hotel room; some hotels add a charge for local calls made from the room in addition to the hefty surcharge placed on all international calls. Second, do not expect that calls to attractions or tourist offices will always be answered; endless ringing or an endlessly repeating busy signal are two alltoo-common occurrences. And third, if you do not speak fluent Spanish local calls to most businesses, police stations and public service agencies will quickly grind to a halt.

Check with your service provider to make sure that your mobile phone will be operable in Mexico. If you only plan to make a few calls and send a few text messages or emails, find out how much it will cost. Depending on the nature of your travel plans, consider purchasing a temporary international calling or data package that can be canceled after you return (as long as there's no minimum length-of-time requirement).

Confirm your provider's policy regarding international roaming charges, which are often expensive. T-Mobile, for one, does not charge for data usage and caps international calling rates. It's also a good idea to turn off automatic usage downloads that deliver emails and other data to your phone while you're away, as they can result in expensive roaming charges. Map, itinerary, flight notification and other apps can be handy additions while traveling, so take time to research, price compare and download any you'll want at your disposal prior to your departure date.

Make sure you bring your charger and plug adapter, and keep them with other essentials like personal identification and medicines. Also check your available storage before you leave and free up additional space by transferring photos and videos to your personal computer and deleting unused apps.

If you want to avoid international roaming charges, obtain a prepaid SIM (subscriber identification module) chip that will provide you with a new local phone number while in Mexico as well as an affordable calling plan. To do this, however, your phone must be "unlocked" from your original carrier's network. You also won't be able to make or receive calls via your regular cellphone number while in Mexico. The chip needs to be activated, which can be done in Mexico at a mobile store, or you can try ordering one in advance and activating it online.

Another option is to purchase a cellphone in Mexico to use for the duration of your trip, although it will be locked to the local provider's network. Inexpensive phones are sold at Walmarts and OXXO convenience stores, and you can purchase plan minutes on a pay-as-you-go basis.

Calls to Mexican cellphone numbers—either locally or long distance within the country-must be prefaced by dialing 044, which replaces the access code 01. The 044 prefix does not need to be dialed if calling a Mexican cellphone number from outside the country, although you will still need to dial the international access number and the appropriate area code. There are no long-distance cellphone charges; calls made to local as well as out-ofarea-code cell numbers from a landline are charged as a local call.

Few coin-operated public pay phones remain in Mexico; most public phones are labeled Telmex, the name of the country's largest telephone company, and are part of a system called Ladatel—literally, long distance (lada) telephone. Ladatel phones allow direct dialing without operator assistance and are less expensive than making phone calls from a hotel room. Local calls also can be made from Ladatel phones. Avoid public phones claiming to offer low long-distance rates for calls to the United States and Canada; the cost per minute will be exorbitant.

Most Ladatel pay phones have a slot in which to insert a disposable, chip-embedded Ladatel phone card. These cards come in various peso denominations (typically 30, 50 or 100 pesos) and can be purchased at any convenience store.

To make a call with a Ladatel card, insert it with the computer chip facing up and toward the phone. Dial the access code (if necessary) plus the number you're trying to reach. The card is left in the slot while the call takes place. If the call does not go through, the card is returned. If the call is for less time than the value of the card, it is returned with a credit amount shown (the card does not expire). If the call is still in progress when the card's value has been used up, the phone will beep and another card must be inserted to continue the call. Some phones have a digital display window that monitors the cost of the call.

If you want to connect directly to an international destination toll free and without speaking to an operator, use your calling card and dial 01 (for AT&T) or 001 (for Verizon or Sprint) plus the 800 access number for your longdistance carrier. AT&T's USA DIRECT number is (800) 288-2872; Verizon Wireless, (800) 674-7000; and Sprint, (800) 877-8000.

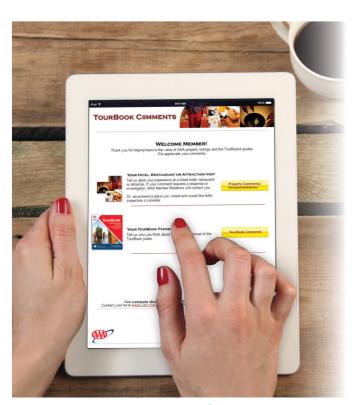
If you have a problem trying to make a specific local or long-distance call, enlist the aid of an operator; there are few recordings advising callers of phone number or area code changes. To reach a long-distance operator within Mexico, dial 020; for directory assistance, dial 040; for police or emergency assistance, dial 911; for an international operator, dial 010. English will likely not be spoken.

To make an international call to the United States or Canada on a private phone line in Mexico, dial 001, then the area code and phone number. If calling collect, dial 91, then the area code and phone number. If you call collect from your hotel room and the call is not accepted, however, you may still be charged.

### **Time Zones**

Most of Mexico's states are on Central Standard Time. Exceptions are the states of Baja California Sur, Chihuahua, Nayarit, Sinaloa and Sonora, which are on Mountain Standard Time; Baja California, which is on Pacific Standard Time: and Quintana Roo, which is on Eastern Standard Time.

Mexico observes daylight saving time (DST, referred to as horario de verano, or "summer time") from the first weekend in April through the last weekend in October. Ten northern border municipalities (including Ciudad Juárez, Mexicali, Nuevo Laredo, Reynosa and Tijuana) observe daylight saving time in accordance with the U.S., from the second Sunday in March through the first weekend in November. Note: The states of Quintana Roo and Sonora does not observe daylight saving time.



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# Yucatán Peninsula

exico's Yucatán (yoo-cah-TAHN) Peninsula is all about contradictions—it's a mix of old and new, natural and man-made, primitive and masterplanned. Geographic, ethnographic and historical factors combine to separate the Yucatán from the rest of Mexico, and it's a feeling shared by many of the people who live here—many think of themselves as yucatecos first, Mexicans second.

Mayan civilization, which first evolved in central America and extreme southern Mexico, eventually migrated northward to the present-day states of Campeche and Yucatán. Between the 10th and 15th centuries the cities of Chichén Itzá, Cobá, Dzibilchaltún, Edzná, Ek Balam, Mayapán, Tulum and Uxmal were built. Over time the focus of Mayan life shifted from the observance of elaborate religious rituals toward commercial, governmental and militaristic concerns. But it all came crashing to the ground by the end of the 16th century, when Spanish conquest of the Yucatán was complete.

The Yucatecan people—direct descendants of the Maya—are one of Mexico's largest indígena groups. Short stature, dark-skinned complexions and sculpted cheekbones all bear witness to their ancestors. Mayan dialects are as readily spoken as Spanish, although residents employed in the tourist industry usually speak English as well. Yucatecans are friendly; don't be afraid to ask for the time or for directions, but return the kindness with a smile and a thank-you.

Rising from the peninsula's flat scrubland are such archeological sites as Chichén Itzá, Ek Balam and Uxmal, where monumentally scaled buildings created without the basic assistance of the wheel or metal tools benefit from ongoing restoration. In contrast to the small rural villages dotting the Yucatán's rolling hills stands Mérida, one of the first cities to be built by the Spanish. Fine old buildings, ornate mansions and tropical vegetation give Mérida an exotic feel, and its lively plazas and numerous cultural offerings make the city a delightful place to explore.

But the Yucatán's vacation destination of choice is Cancún, which was just a small fishing village in the late 1960s. Since then it's become a major vacation destination for beach lovers, spring breakers and winter-weary gringos.

The stretch of Caribbean coast between Cancún and Tulum is a tourist magnet all its own, with lovely beaches and accommodations ranging from eco-friendly *casitas* to seriously upscale resorts. What to do? The Riviera Maya has family-friendly aquatic theme parks, cenotes in which you can swim and snorkel and an offshore barrier reef for divers, among other enticements.

In stark contrast to manufactured paradise is the very real wilderness of the Sian Ka'an Biosphere Reserve, designated a World Heritage Site in 1987 by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). Covering more than a million acres along the

peninsula's eastern frontier, Sian Ka'an's tropical forests, lagoons and mangrove marshes are all protected from human encroachment and commercial development.

AAA recommends that travelers consult online U.S. State Department travel advisories when planning traveling abroad. Find this information at travel.state.gov/content/passports/en/country/mexico.html.

AKUMAL, QUINTANA ROO— See Akumal, Quintana Roo p. 105.

### CAMPECHE, CAMPECHE

Capital of the state of the same name, Campeche (kahm-PEH-cheh) is the largest city between Villahermosa and Mérida. Its waterfront, dotted by offshore oil rigs, is the base of Mexico's largest gulf coast shrimp fleet.

Hernández de Córdova and his *conquistadores* stopped in this area in 1517 to obtain fresh water. Founded in 1540 by Don Francisco de Montejo, the city flourished from the export of hardwoods and dyewoods to Europe. One of the foremost cities of New Spain in the mid-16th century, Campeche preserves buildings that date from this period in its old San Francisco section. One such structure was the house where Montejo planned his conquest of the Yucatán.

Campeche's most remarkable attraction is a massive 1.5-mile hexagonal wall with eight fortresses that was erected for protection against repeated sackings by European pirates in the 16th and 17th centuries. Begun in



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1686, the fortification took 18 years to build. The historic fortified section of the city was designated a World Heritage Site by UNESCO in 1999.

Fort Soledad (Fuerte de la Soledad), 3 blocks north of the ancient Puerta del Mar entranceway, has been converted into a museum displaying Mayan artifacts, an arms collection and exhibits on colonial history. Fort San Carlos (Fuerte de San Carlos), a government-sponsored handicrafts market today, has intriguing secret underground passageways. Linked to many houses in the city, the tunnels provided a hiding place for women and children when pirate ships came to plunder. Most passageways are sealed off with bricks, but guides offer tours into the fort's basement for a small fee. The fort's roof, complete with ancient cannons, offers a spectacular view of the gulf.

Although the city is studded with ancient walls and fortresses, the Government Palace and the Legislative Palace are respectively referred to as "the jukebox" and "the flying saucer" for their modern architectural styles. Local markets sell such handicrafts as Panama hats and articles made of alligator skin. The regional cuisine features exotic dishes like shark stew. Other points of interest include the 1540 Franciscan Cathedral, the oldest convent church in the Yucatán Peninsula; the 1546 Convent of San Francisco, the site of one of the first masses in Campeche; the Temple of San Francisquito, which now houses the Campeche Cultural Institute (Instituto Cultural Campechano); and the House of the King's Lieutenant (Casa del Teniente del Rey), which contains colonial furnishings. Alameda Park's Bridge of Dogs (El Puente de Los Perros), a colonial bridge guarded by carved stone dogs, honors the Dominican missionaries called the "Dogs of God" for their zealous hounding of converts.

Among the words coined in Campeche is *campechano*, used to describe a pleasant, easygoing person. Local tradition has it that the word "cocktail" originated here centuries ago because English pirates were served drinks adorned by palm fronds resembling cocks' tails. Happily, the root of Campeche's name, taken from the Mayan words *kim* and *pech*, meaning "serpent" and "tick," has no modern application.

Campeche State Tourism Office: downtown at Plaza Moch-Couoh, on Avenida Ruiz Cortines. **Phone:** (981) 127-3300.



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# Cancún

City Population: 934,189 Elevation: 7 meters (23 feet)

### **Editor's Picks:**

Cancún Maya Museum	(see p	. 52)
Tulum Ruins	. (see p.	166)
Xcaret	. (see p.	131)

### **GOOD FACTS TO KNOW**

### WHOM TO CALL

**Police (emergency):** To contact the local police, dial 911.

Hospitals: Most major local hotels have their own in-house or on-call doctor. A list of physicians can also be obtained

from the U.S. Consular Agency, in the Torre la Europea building, Boulevard Kukulcán Km marker 13; phone (999) 316-7168 in Mexico or (844) 528-6611 in the U.S. Local clinics do not accept U.S. health insurance, often charge fees well above U.S. rates and have been known to charge for services not rendered. The Red Cross (Cruz Roja) is in Ciudad Cancún on Avenida Yaxchilán, between avenidas Xcaret and Labná. It is open 24 hours; phone (998) 884-1616. In an emergency, dial 911 and request an English-speaking operator.

### WHERE TO LOOK

### **Newspapers**

The Miami Herald and USA Today are available in the bigger local hotels.

#### **Publications**

Cancún Tips magazine has easy-to-read maps and information about local restaurants, shopping, entertainment and other



Please refer to pages 10-11 for Inspected Clean details.

things to do in Cancún. Pick up free tourist-oriented brochures at the airport, hotel lobbies, shopping centers and sidewalk booths.

### WHAT TO KNOW

### **Currency Exchange**

Casas de cambio (currency exchange houses) and banks are along Avenida Tulum in downtown Ciudad Cancún. Most banks are open Mon.-Fri. 9-5; currency exchange normally is confined to the morning hours. Currency exchange houses also are at the airport and in the Hotel Zone shopping areas around Cancún

ATM withdrawals are in pesos. Some machines dispense dollars, but the fee is likely to be hefty and the exchange rate unfavorable. Since the rates offered by casas de cambio and banks usually differ only slightly and fluctuate daily, exchanging dollars boils down to a matter of convenience. You'll want to keep some peso coins and smaller denomination bills on hand, since not everything (bus and taxi fares, for example) can be paid for by credit card or in dollars.

### Staying Safe

Crime directed at tourists is not prevalent, but do use common sense. Keep jewelry and other valuables in the hotel safe, or don't bring them at all. Guard against petty theft or pursesnatching incidents in crowded public places or when using public transportation. If leaving a vehicle in Hotel Zone shopping areas, don't invite a break-in by leaving valuables in plain view.

Keep your wits about you in any bar or nightclub; criminals have been known to tamper with drinks in an attempt to drug unsuspecting individuals. If you're going out to dinner, especially to Ciudad Cancún from the Hotel Zone, go with at least one other person or a group, and carry only one credit card and very little cash. While it's safe to walk around during the day, always take a taxi after dark, whether in Ciudad Cancún or the Hotel Zone. Avoid hailing a taxi from the street if at all possible; the safer option is to request a taxi from the front desk agent at a hotel or restaurant. Be sure to ask for the approximate taxi fare in advance to avoid any exploitation.

With white-sand beaches as soft as baby powder, a shimmering Caribbean Sea in a seemingly impossible shade of turquoise and constant sea breezes tempering the tropical heat, it may seem as if someone designed Cancún specifically for vacationers. Perhaps that's because it's not that far off the mark.

While Mayan settlement of the Yucatán is believed to date as far back as 2,500 B.C.— and the Maya had abandoned their city strongholds before Spanish conquistadores even set foot on Mexican soil— Cancún dates only from the late 1960s.

A group of Mexican government analysts identified the area now known as Cancún as a prime spot for tourism development in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Eager developers soon built high-rise condominiums, luxury resorts, a golf course and other amenities on tracts of land where mangroves and marshes once stood.

### **Getting There**

### By Air

Cancún and its surrounding areas are served by Cancún International Airport (CUN), on the mainland off Mex. 307, about 23 kilometers (14 miles) southwest of Cancún's Hotel Zone. The busy Cancún airport receives daily flights from more than 50 airlines around the world; all major airlines in the U.S. and Canada fly to Cancún.

Airport signs indicating arrivals, departures, gates and restrooms are written in Spanish and English. After landing in Cancún, you'll proceed to Immigration to have your tourist permit validated (there's often a long wait). then retrieve your belongings from the baggage claim area before heading to Mexican customs. You'll turn in your completed declaration form while your luggage passes through the random green light/red light system; if the red light flashes, your bags will be briefly searched.

Transportation options from the airport to your hotel include chartered taxis, shuttles, hotel-associated vans, private transfers, public buses and rental cars. You'll see a crowd of van drivers and shuttle bus operators carrying signs outside the airport. Rental car counters are in a consolidated location outside the baggage claim and customs area.

Unlike at other airports, you can't hail a taxi from the curb in Cancún. Instead you'll need to make a reservation in advance to get a taxi from the airport to your hotel. Taxis are bookable online, so you'll know exactly what to expect for the rate and tipping range (typically \$30 to the Hotel Zone, plus tip).

Shuttle service via passenger van is a popular option. Shared shuttles are the most economical, but private shuttles and transfers allow you to have additional luggage and get to your destination faster. You'll want to book shuttles and private transfers in advance; expect rates of anywhere from \$35 to \$95 (U.S.) to get to the Hotel Zone, plus tip. USA Transfers is a reputable company; phone (998) 914-0290 or 01 (800) 212-8931 (tollfree long distance within Mexico). Another affordable option is Happy Shuttle Cancún; phone (800) 818-9821.

Your local AAA travel advisor can assist with booking flights to Cancún and arranging roundtrip transportation from the airport to your hotel.

When departing from Cancún, plan on arriving at least 2 hours before an international flight. Terminal 3 has plenty of



fast-food restaurants, gift shops and duty-free stores on the upper departure level if you get to the airport early.

### By Car

There are two main routes to get to Cancún by car. Driving to Cancún from the west, the main route is Mex. 180, which passes through the cities and towns of Veracruz, Villahermosa, Campeche and Mérida approaching Cancún.

Between Mérida and the small town of Hoctún, the highway is two lanes. At Hoctún, four-lane toll (cuota) highway Mex. 180-D begins and roughly parallels Mex. 180 for about 240 kilometers (144 miles). The highway is in very good condition and is much guicker than Mex. 180, which passes through small towns with numerous speed bumps (topes), but the toll road is isolated with only a few gas stations along its length, which can be an issue if you break down or you're traveling at night. Make sure your tank is always at least half full if you're driving on Mex. 180-D.

Toll plazas are located at the Yucatán/Quintana Roo state line (Plaza de Cobro X-Can), which also is a customs checkpoint, and at the Chichén Itzá exit (Pisté). Fees are paid in pesos (credit and debit cards are not accepted), and you can expect to pay a total of around \$40 (U.S.) in combined charges. The high cost is the major reason why Mex. 180-D is lightly traveled.

Mex. 180-D ends about 16 kilometers (10 miles) west of the airport, and from there you can follow signs to "Cancún/Puerto Juárez" to stay on the mainland, or follow signs to "Tulum/Aeropuerto" to get to the Hotel Zone.



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Driving to Cancún from the south, the main road is Mex. 307, which roughly parallels the coast north of Tulum. This stretch provides easy access to attractions, beach resorts and hotels along the Riviera Maya coast.

Branching northwest off Mex. 307 at Tulum, Mex. 109 provides direct access to the Cobá archeological zone and joins Mex. 180 at the town of X-Can. The distance between Tulum and X-Can is about 85 kilometers (53 miles). This route saves time and mileage if you're driving to Mérida from Tulum.

### By Bus

Public bus service connects Cancún with various points on the Yucatán Peninsula, including Chetumal, Chichén Itzá, Mérida, Playa del Carmen, Tulum and Valladolid. The ADO bus terminal is in downtown Ciudad Cancún across from the Plaza Caribe Hotel, just past the Avenida Uxmal traffic circle (west of Mex. 307/Avenida Tulum and north of Avenida Uxmal).

### By Cruise Ship

Cruise ships do not dock in Cancún, as there are no docking facilities at the port. The closest cruise ship port to Cancún is Cozumel. If you're on a ship that docks at Cozumel and want to spend some time in Cancún, take a ferry from Cozumel to Playa del Carmen, then it's about a 45-minute drive north to Cancún. Alternatively, you can check with the shore excursion desk on your cruise to see if they offer a Cancún package. Depending on the length of time you can be on shore, you could squeeze in a shopping trip or a visit to one of Cancún's beaches.

**Note:** If you arrange a shore excursion through your cruise line, the ship will wait if you aren't back at the scheduled departure time. This is not the case, however, if you arrange the excursion on your own, so keep timing in mind.

### **Getting Around**

### City Layout

It's relatively easy to find your way around Cancún's Hotel Zone, as the four-lane Boulevard Kukulcán (also referred to as Paseo Kukulcán but usually just called "Kukulcán") is the area's main traffic artery and runs the length of the narrow island. Boulevard Kukulcán begins at the junction with Avenida Bonampak, on the eastern edge of Ciudad Cancún, and runs south past Punta Nizuc (Nizuc Point), the island's southern tip, before ending at Mex. 307, near the overpass leading to the airport.

The four-lane road divides briefly at Cancún Point, the elbow of the island's "seven" shape. Where U-turns are permitted, signs in the median say retorno. The speed limit along most of Kukulcán is 40 km/h (25 mph), but the speed limit increases to 60 km/h (37 mph) at the southern end of the island.

You won't often get numbered addresses associated with places in the Hotel Zone. Instead, Kilometer markers installed in the median (from Km 1, just past the mainland, to Km 25 beyond Nizuc Point) are used to designate locations. Directions are often given in reference to wellknown landmarks or hotels (and most people can speak English). Because there is only one main road, it's almost impossible to get lost in Cancún's Hotel Zone.

Navigating around downtown Ciudad Cancún, or "El Centro," is another story. Driving can be daunting even if you know where you're going. There are numerous one-way streets and traffic circles (glorietas), as well as crowds of pedestrians and unfamiliar traffic signals. For an excursion into El Centro for dinner or shopping, take a bus or a taxi.

Ciudad Cancún is divided into districts called super manzanas (shortened to SM), each containing several blocks surrounding a central square or park. Avenida López Portillo runs east to west and consists of the intown section of Mex. 180. Avenida Tulum runs north to south and is a portion of Mex. 307, which runs south toward the airport and continues down the coast toward Tulum.

Most souvenir shops and restaurants in Ciudad Cancún are located along or near Avenida Tulum and Avenida Cobá. (Avenida Coba becomes Boulevard Kukulcán as it heads east and enters the Hotel Zone.) Parque de las Palapas is centrally located a block west of Avenida Tulum. The family-oriented park has craft sellers who set up their wares and food vendors offering popcorn, fried bananas and the doughnut-like snacks called churros. Casual restaurants line Tulipanes, a nearby pedestrian street, and popular local eateries are within walking distance of the park.

### **Rental Cars**

Consider renting a car in Cancún if you plan to venture outside the Hotel Zone and don't want to rely on buses, taxis or organized tours to get there. Renting a car will make it convenient to plan a day trip or overnight trip down the coast to Tulum or inland to the ruins of Chichén Itzá or Cobá. The quality of most regional roads is good, but don't underestimate the amount of time it will take to drive to your destination. You should also avoid driving after dark in Cancún.

Car rental rates are expensive if you rent on the spot; you can get the best deal by making reservations in advance; a AAA travel counselor can help you find good options. Arrange for rental car pickup and drop-off at the airport to eliminate taxi fares, and be sure you fully understand the terms of any rental car contract you sign. If the car only has half a tank of gas when you pick it up, you should be able to return it with half a tank, but double check this rule before you drive off.

Keep in mind that license plates on rental vehicles say renta, which marks you as a visitor. If you don't feel comfortable driving in an unfamiliar place, you may be able to hire a driver through the major rental car agencies; ask about this option when you book.

Hertz is one of several rental car agencies available in Cancún, with offices at the airport, at two locations in downtown Ciudad Cancún, and in the Hotel Zone at La Isla Shopping Village and Flamingo Plaza. AAA members receive discounts through Hertz for vehicles booked in the United States; phone (800) 654-3080.

### **Buses**

The public bus system is an easy and convenient way to get around Cancún. Using the bus is much cheaper than taking a cab, especially if you're staying at the southern end of the Hotel Zone. Buses operate 24 hours a day and cost just 8.5 pesos in the Hotel Zone or 7 pesos in Cuidad Cancún.

Ruta 1 and Ruta 2 buses (marked with R-1, Hoteles or Zona Hotelera on the windshield) run regularly from the mainland along Boulevard Kukulcán to the southern end of the Hotel Zone (around the Km 20 marker) and back. The Ruta 8 bus goes to Puerto Juárez and Punta Sam for the ferries to Isla Mujeres.

Bus fare can be paid with pesos or U.S. dollars, but drivers will only make change if you pay with pesos. There are frequent stops along the length of Boulevard Kukulcán, or you can tell the driver where you want to get off. Buses can also be flagged from hotel driveway entrances.

Keep in mind that buses are likely to be the most crowded in the morning and evening, when mainland locals use them to get to and from work. The buses jolt along and can stop suddenly, so watch your footing.

### **Taxis**

Getting a taxi in Cancún's Hotel Zone can be very expensive, even if you're just going from one hotel to the next. Taxis in the Hotel Zone are not metered, so you'll pay based on a zone system. Arranging for a cab directly at your hotel is convenient and safer than hailing one on the street, but these cabs also tend to have the highest rates. Some hotels list the taxi fares to various destinations at the front entrance; if not, ask the front desk. Always confirm the trip rate with the driver before you get into their car, and have Mexican pesos on hand.

Taxis on the mainland have a cheaper rate structure (also based on a zone system) than the Hotel Zone taxis, so if you're going from the Hotel Zone to Ciudad Cancún, Puerto Juárez or Punta Sam, take the Kukulcán bus to the mainland before getting a taxi to your destination. You can also hire a taxi to Chichén Itzá or for a drive south along the Riviera Maya, although you'll pay a steep hourly rate for this convenience.

### **Ferries**

Taking a ferry from Cancún to nearby Isla Mujeres is an easy and popular day trip. Enclosed, air-conditioned Ultramar passenger ferries make the 15-20 minute trip to Isla Mujeres often, and the island offers an excellent beach with calm surf, snorkeling adventures, a turtle sanctuary and golf cart tours.

To catch the Ultramar ferry to Isla Mujeres (about \$15-\$21 round-trip), head to Puerto Juárez, about 3 kilometers (2 miles) north of Cancún via Avenida López Portillo (Mex. 180). The ferries depart from the Gran Puerto terminal about every half-hour from 6:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m., then hourly from 3 to 11 p.m. The final return trip from Isla Mujeres is at midnight. Note: The ferry ride can be choppy even in good weather, so it's a good idea to take the proper precautions if you're prone to seasickness.

You can also catch an Ultramar ferry to Isla Mujeres from terminals closer to the Hotel Zone, though the schedule isn't as frequent. Ferries depart from the dock at Playa Tortugas (Km marker 6.5 on Boulevard Kukulcán) and Playa Caracol (Km marker 8.5 on Boulevard Kuku-Icán). Check the Ultramar website for current Isla Mujeres ferry schedules and fares.

### **Parking**

Street parking is limited in Ciudad Cancún and the Hotel Zone. Park on city streets at your own discretion. If you have a rental car or are driving your own vehicle, keep it in the hotel parking lot— most of them are guarded— and use buses, cabs or shuttles for local excursions. Many hotels, shopping centers and restaurants do offer complimentary valet; a tip of 40 pesos is customary for an hour of parking.

#### Guides/Tours

The most popular day trip excursions from Cancún are to Isla Mujeres (see separate listing under The Caribbean Coast), the Tulum Ruins (see attraction listing under Tulum), Xcaret (see attraction listing under Playa del Carmen) and Xel-Ha (see attraction listing under Tulum). Another popular option is a guided tour of the Chichén

Itzá archeological ruins (see separate listing under Yucatán Peninsula).

Many hotels have a travel agency representative on-site or a concierge who can assist with making tour arrangements. Cancún-based tour operators also offer excursions and vacation packages that include transportation and hotel pickup.

A few organized tours are worth a mention. For trips from Cancún to Tulum or Chichén Itzá, Gray Line Cancún offers motorcoach tours that will pick you up from most major hotels in the Hotel Zone. For information phone 01 (800) 719-5465 (toll-free long distance within Mexico) or (800) 235-4079 (from the United States).

Xichen Tours offers a full-day excursion to Chichén Itzá and the town of Valladolid that includes a guided tour of the ruins followed by a visit to Cenote Zaci and a buffet lunch at a restored colonial mansion. Round-trip transportation from hotels in Cancún, Playa del Carmen and the Riviera Maya is included. The cost is \$145 (U.S.); \$73 (ages 5-11). Discounted tickets can be purchased online. For reservation information, phone (998) 883-3143 (in Cancún), (984) 206-0038 (in Playa del Carmen) or (855) 326-2696 (from the United States and Canada).

If you're planning to visit Xcaret and don't have a rental car, an organized bus excursion is a good way to get there. Tour packages that include Xcaret can provide roundtrip transportation from a number of hotels in Cancún, Playa del Carmen and along the Riviera Maya coast. The total cost is around \$110 (U.S.) or \$55 (ages 5-11), with discounts available online. For reservation information phone (855) 326-0682. For additional information contact the Xcaret information center in Cancún. phone (998) 251-6560, or in Playa del Carmen, phone (984) 147-6560.

### What To See

CANCÚN MAYA MUSEUM (Museo Maya de Cancún) is on Blvd. Kukulcán at Km marker 16.5. This architecturally impressive museum, built over a 6-year period by Mexico's National Institute of Anthropology and History (INAH), was the largest INAH project undertaken since the construction of the Templo Mayor Museum in Mexico City in 1987. Around 400 archeological artifacts are displayed in three large exhibition halls; some were unearthed during recent excavations and others had not been exhibited previously.

One of the highlights when visitors first enter is a collection of 14,000-year-old skeletal remains discovered in one of Tulum's underwater caves. Room 1 is dedicated to the Mayan civilization and contains items acquired over 30 years of archeological research, along with a historical timeline of human habitation on the Yucatán Peninsula.

Room 2 showcases the regions occupied by the Mayan people—southeastern Mexico, neighboring Belize and Guatemala, and parts of El Salvador and Honduras. Exhibits feature aspects of daily life and an overview of Maya art and architecture. Room 3 presents temporary changing exhibits. There are covered and exposed areas. Wear a hat, sunscreen and comfortable walking shoes, and bring up to 20 oz. of water.

Time: Allow 2 hours minimum. Phone: (998) 885-3842 or (998) 885-3843. **GT** 

INTERACTIVE AQUARIUM CANCÚN is on the lagoon side of Blvd. Kukulcán at Km 12.5, in La Isla Shopping Village. This small aguarium has tanks displaying piranhas, moray eels, jellyfish, seahorses, anemones, corals and tropical reef fish. Marine artifacts include a dolphin skeleton. Visitors can also touch giant rays, swim with dolphins and embark on Delphinus Trek, an underwater walking experience. A dolphin show takes place daily at 7

Phone: (998) 251-6581.

SIAN KA'AN BIOSPHERE RESERVE— see Tulum p. 166.



TULUM RUINS— see Tulum p. 166.



XCARET— see Playa del Carmen p. 131.



XEL-HA— see Tulum p. 167.



XPLOR— see Playa del Carmen p. 132.

### What To Do

### Dining

Hotel Zone restaurants offer uniformly reliable quality and predictable expense. Many all-inclusive properties go to great lengths to keep their guests on the premises, and some may charge for meals whether they are eaten or not. The more expensive hotels also tend to emphasize a fine-dining experience. Don't expect much in the way of regional cookery; U.S. fast-food and chain restaurant franchises, as well as Mexican chains like Sr. Frog's, are the norm.

Ciudad Cancún is a different story. Avenida Tulum is lined with local restaurants, and most have outdoor tables. Look for places where locals congregate if you want authentically prepared Yucatecan dishes like sopa de lima—soup with a chicken broth base, vegetables and



a tangy dose of fresh lime juice—or poc-chuc, spicy marinated pork grilled with onions.

One local favorite—and a place where you can sample home-style cooking for a fraction of the cost of the Hotel Zone restaurants—is Checándole, downtown at Av. Xpuhil #27 (near Mercado 28). It serves tacos, steak tampiqueña, enchiladas with mole sauce and other Mexican standards, along with fresh fruit juices. From the Hotel Zone, a Ruta 6 bus will get you there.

For a reasonably priced Mexican-style breakfast try one of Cancún's coffee shops. At Vips, a popular chain with branches all over the country, you can order standards like huevos motuleños-two fried eggs, peas and diced ham atop a crispy tortilla covered in tomato sauce, with pureed black beans and slices of fried banana on the side. This, plus toast, orange juice and good cafe americano, will fill you up for about \$10. The Hotel Zone Vips is next to the Cancún Center.

Restaurants in the large hotels use purified water for cooking and for washing produce; inquire about this health procedure specifically at places to eat on the mainland. In general, avoid ice cubes in drinks unless you know purified water has been used, and stay away from uncooked fruits and vegetables. See the Lodgings & Restaurants section for AAA Diamond designated nearby restaurants.

### Shopping

If you're looking for fun things to do in Ciudad Cancún, a variety of shops and open-air craft markets line Avenida Tulum (Mex. 307). Mercado Ki-Huic, near the intersection of Avenida Tulum (Mex. 307) and Avenida Labná (about six blocks south of Avenida Coba/Boulevard Kukulcán), is a flea market a block long with more than 100 vendors offering handicrafts, knickknacks, marble chess sets, men's guayabera shirts, huipil (ee-PEEL) dresses and Panama hats.

Another downtown crafts market that's worth a trip is Mercado 28, off Avenida Xel-Ha. In addition to vendors selling every imaginable type of trinket and souvenir, this open-air market has lots of local restaurants and places to eat. It all adds up to a colorful hodgepodge that's fun to visit. Bargaining is expected, and some sellers can be aggressive, especially if there aren't that many potential customers wandering around.

As a duty-free zone Cancún offers potential bargains on international merchandise. High-quality tequila and cigars



are two of the most popular purchases. Ultrafemme, Av. Tulum #111 (about 4 blocks north of Avenida Cobá), has good buys on cosmetics, jewelry and imported perfume; there also are Ultrafemme locations in several malls and at the airport.

Ciudad Cancún's major mall is Plaza las Americas, several blocks south of Avenida Cobá/Boulevard Kukulcán between Avenida Tulum and Avenida Bonampak. In addition to department stores Liverpool and Sears and a Chedraui grocery store, it has more than 200 other stores and boutiques that are a mix of local businesses and mall favorites like Benetton. There's also a Sanborns restaurant, a food court and the Cinépolis movie multiplex.

If you feel the need to shop for basics while on vacation, branches of three familiar stateside retailers also are in Ciudad Cancún. Costco is at the corner of avenidas Rojo Gomez and Yaxchilán, while Sam's Club and Walmart are adjacent to each other near the intersection of avenidas Xcaret and Yaxchilán. Pick up convenience items at an Oxxo store (similar to 7-11); there are numerous branches downtown and a couple in the Hotel Zone.

Shopping in the Hotel Zone usually focuses on two things: pricey specialty items, or T-shirts and beach supplies. Window-shopping is a popular pastime, but don't expect a lot of bargains. For garden-variety souvenirs it pays to look around, as merchants compete vigorously for tourist dollars and prices can be on the steep side. Inspect carefully before buying; quality can vary greatly.

Plaza Caracol is at Boulevard Kukulcán Km 8.5 (next to the Cancún Center). This mall's marble walls and floors provide an elegant-looking setting for shops and boutiques offering jewelry, designer clothing, resort wear, silver and decorative art. Pharmacies, art galleries, cafés and nearby restaurants are also on the premises.

Forum-by-the-Sea, Km 9.5 near the Cancún Center, is a three-level entertainment complex. There are specialty boutiques like Nike Store and Zingara Swimwear, as well as retailers selling the ubiquitous sunglasses, jewelry and souvenirs. The emphasis, however, is on restaurants, bars and nightspots, including a branch of popular chain Carlos 'n Charlie's.

Flamingo Plaza, Km 11.5 on Kukulcán (lagoon side), is a one-level shopping center with boutiques selling resort fashions, jewelry and arts and crafts, along with a currency exchange office, an internet café and restaurants like Bubba Gump Shrimp Company and Outback Steakhouse.

The Hotel Zone's hottest mall destination is La Isla Shopping Village, Km 12.5 on Kukulcán (lagoon side). La Isla is as bright and shiny as anything you'll find back home. The stores and shops are linked by bridges and walkways crisscrossing small canals. Among the familiar stateside eateries are Johnny Rockets and Chili's. There also is a movie multiplex, the Interactive Aquarium Cancún (see attraction listing) and other family-friendly features and things to do. It's upscale and expensive but one of the fun places to go to spend a few hours, especially on a rainy day.

At Km marker 13 is Kukulcán Plaza, which caters to tourists with stores and boutiques offering gifts, handicrafts, perfume, leather goods, jewelry and silver. It also contains a parking garage, bank, currency exchange offices, drugstores and a food court that includes U.S. fastfood franchises. The mall's "Luxury Avenue" features such high-end retailers as Burberry, Cartier, Fendi, Montblanc and Salvatore Ferragamo.

The Mercado de Artesanías Coral Negro, a peachcolored building just south of the Cancún Center (at the point where Boulevard Kukulcán splits), is the only flea market in the Hotel Zone. The selection of items encompasses everything from sombreros and painted pottery to toys and T-shirts. You can also get a temporary tattoo or have your hair braided. Unlike at shops where prices are fixed, haggling with the vendors is expected here.

Most of the mall stores are open daily 10-8 or 10 p.m. Outside the Hotel Zone some stores observe the traditional siesta and close for a few hours in the afternoon. Hours for craft and souvenir markets may vary seasonally. The sales tax is 16 percent, which may be waived at some shops if you pay in cash. Paying with cash instead of a credit card may also lower the price when bargaining with vendors. Almost all stores will accept U.S. dollars, and at some establishments prices are quoted in dollars rather than pesos.

### **Beaches**

Hurricane Wilma decimated Cancún's spectacular Caribbean beaches, which were literally replaced when sand dredged from the bottom 20 miles offshore was dumped on top of areas where the storm's fury had completely washed it away. That means they're artificial, which makes little difference to visitors on a Cancún vacation—the white sand is soft and fine grained, and the water ranges in color from opalescent green to vivid turquoise. It's also warm enough for swimming all year.

The beaches at the northern end of the Hotel Zone fronting Bahía Mujeres are narrow and have calm, shallow water. Those fronting the Caribbean are wider and more dramatic, with occasional crashing breakers and dangerous undertows.

The best beaches are in front of the big hotels. All beaches in Mexico, however, are federally owned and therefore public, even stretches that may seem like they are on hotel property. Keep in mind that you cannot use

hotel facilities unless you are a guest, although changing areas and outdoor showers are available. Note the flags posted to indicate surf conditions. A green flag indicates safe conditions for swimming; yellow indicates caution; and red or black, dangerous conditions. Riptides can be unpredictable; when conditions are dangerous, do not venture past where you can safely stand.

The biggest issue facing Cancún's beaches today is the recent arrival of a smelly seaweed known as sargassum. Stick to the northern beaches to avoid the worst of it.

The "inner" coast of Cancún Island borders saltwater Nichupté Lagoon. Much of the lagoon is lined with stands of mangrove. Nichupté doesn't have the Caribbean's beauty, but the calm water is ideal for things to do like boating and water skiing, and the local restaurants along the shore are popular places for sunset watching.

The following designated public beaches are described in the order they appear along Cancún Island, beginning at the top of the island's "seven" configuration after leaving the mainland.

**PLAYA LINDA** is just before the bridge over Nichupté Channel, at Km marker 4. It's not the best swimming beach, but there are snack and dive equipment shops in the vicinity. Ferries to Isla Mujeres embark from the dock at nearby El Embarcadero.

PLAYA LANGOSTA is next to the Casa Maya Hotel at Km marker 5. "Lobster Beach" fronts Mujeres Bay and has gentle waves that make it safe for swimming. A small building houses a restaurant and an ice cream shop. Nearby are several yacht clubs, water sports facilities and more restaurants. The dock at this beach is a departure point for tour boats.

PLAYA TORTUGAS is off Blvd. Kukulcán at Km 6.5. Frequented by local families, it faces the calm waters of Mujeres Bay. White sand and clear turquoise water make it a beautiful beach, but it can also get crowded and noisy, especially on weekends, so it isn't the place for solitude seekers. A bungee-jumping tower provides thrills, and you can rent lounge chairs and umbrellas. This beach also attracts souvenir vendors, so be prepared to firmly say "no" if you're not interested in purchasing anything.

PLAYA CARACOL is at Blvd. Kukulcán Km 8.5. close to the Fiesta Americana Grand Coral Beach hotel. Farther east is Cancún Point, the crook of the Cancún Island elbow. The very tip of the point, behind the Hyatt Ziva Cancún resort, is where Mujeres Bay meets the open Caribbean. Isla Mujeres is visible in the distance. Waves crash against the rocks and send up plumes of spray on the Caribbean side, while just around the point, closer to the Fiesta Americana, the water is calm, shallow and better for swimming.

PLAYA CHAC-MOOL entrance is at Boulevard Kukulcán Km 9.5, across from Señor Frog's. This short stretch of beachfront is popular due to its proximity to many of the Hotel Zone's nightclubs, shopping centers and restaurants, although parking is limited. The water is gorgeous but the bottom tends to be rocky, and the Caribbean surf also is subject to large waves and strong undertows. Changing facilities are available.

PLAYA DELFINES is at Km marker 18 toward the southern end of the Hotel Zone. It offers a panoramic view of turquoise water, and a large "Cancún" sign offers a touristy photo op. Swimming can be hazardous due to rough surf (a green flag means conditions are safe for swimming). There's also free parking.

### Sightseeing

One fun—and free—sightseeing activity is to go hotel hopping. The Hotel Zone is chock-full of architecturally striking resorts, and even if you're staying at one it's worth checking out some of the others (consider it research for your next vacation). The public "Hoteles" buses that travel the length of Boulevard Kukulcán (see "Buses" under *Getting Around)* are the best way to get from one property to another, as they stop frequently and will let you off right at the hotel entrance (keep in mind, however, that you must pay bus fare each time you reboard).

Many resorts are state-of-the-art examples of imaginative design, with lavish public areas and swimming pool complexes looking out onto the Caribbean's aguamarine waters. It doesn't cost anything to tour a property, and you can take your pick of restaurants and lounges to indulge in a leisurely lunch or a relaxing pit stop. However, many all-inclusive resorts, such as the Beach Palace Cancún and Hotel RIU Cancún, do not allow non-guests to walk around their public areas.

Which ones should you see? The Fiesta Americana Grand Coral Beach Resort & Spa has a spacious, highceilinged lobby that radiates understated luxury—marble floors, giant flower arrangements and fine art displayed in recessed wall nooks, with cozy sitting areas scattered about. The Paradisus Cancún Resort is one of the largest properties in the Hotel Zone, with the guest rooms housed in five soaring, pyramid-shaped buildings. The public areas here are jungle-like, festooned with hanging plants, dripping with water and incorporating decorative elements—including oversized statues, frescos and calendars—that reflect Mayan motifs and culture. "Expansive" best describes the Iberostar Cancún, a dramatic pyramidal building with an enormous lobby and a series of interconnected pools that end up looking out on a spectacular stretch of beach.

Cancún is not a cruise ship destination, but that doesn't mean you can't take a cruise. Boats ply Nichupté Lagoon

and the waters around Cancún Island, Cozumel and Isla Mujeres. Prices range from about \$50-\$70 (U.S.) per person, including beverages and entertainment. It's one of the fun things to do with friends and is a great option for group travel. Boat operators and itineraries change, so check with your hotel or a local travel agency to see what's available.

Aquaworld Marina, at Km 15.2 on the lagoon side of Boulevard Kukulcán, offers an Isla Mujeres day trip that includes ferry transportation to the island, a visit to a beach club, a buffet lunch and time for shopping; phone (998) 848-8326 for more information and to make travel reservations.

### Recreation

Water sports, not surprisingly, top Cancún's list of leisure activities and fun things to do.

Fishing is excellent; the open Caribbean, Mujeres Bay, the channel between Cozumel and the mainland, and the waters of Nichupté Lagoon together are home to some 500 species, including all types of game fish. Bonito, dorado and sailfish run from March into July; bluefin tuna from April through June. Barracuda, grouper, mackerel and red snapper can be hooked all year.

Hotel Zone marinas offer a range of vessels and topof-the-line equipment that are perfect for group travel. Larger boats are 35-40 feet long; single-engine diesel boats average 26-28 feet. Four- and 8-hour charter excursions normally include a captain, first mate, gear, bait and soft drinks. Cost varies and the marinas compete for business, so it pays to shop around; ask at your hotel for recommendations.

Scuba diving and snorkeling are best at the southern end of Cancún Island around Nizuc Point, off Cozumel and Isla Mujeres, and in Nichupté Lagoon. Dive shops along Boulevard Kukulcán rent equipment, give lessons and schedule trips if you're looking for things to do this weekend; some hotels also can arrange dive excursions. Check credentials, and if possible get the inside scoop from a diver familiar with the area. Diving conditions are best from May or June through August.

Scuba Cancún, on the lagoon side of Kukulcán at Km marker 5 (across from Playa Langosta), offers daily snorkeling trips that visit local reefs (on Tuesday and Thursday through Sunday) and the Underwater Museum of Art (MUSA) on Tuesday and Friday. All-day snorkeling excursions to Cozumel depart on Wednesday and Friday; cavern snorkeling trips depart on Thursday and Saturday.

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Open water certification is required for one- and two-tank dive trips in the waters off Cancún and Cozumel and to destinations along the Riviera Maya coast. Phone (998) 849-5226.

The best place for activities like water skiing, windsurfing, parasailing, swimming and boating is Nichupté Lagoon; ski clubs along Boulevard Kukulcán on the lagoon side rent boats and equipment. Windsurfing propels its participants across the water at exhilarating speeds; the sailboard used by windsurfers is a masted sail attached to a surfboard. Many Hotel Zone swimming pools have the added bonus of the Caribbean as a scenic backdrop.

For those who prefer activities on land there's **golf** at the Cancún Golf Club at Pok-Ta-Pok, a championship 18hole course designed by Robert Trent Jones Jr. Located on an island between Laguna de Bojórquez and Laguna Nichupté (access is off Boulevard Kukulcán at Km 7.5), it offers fine views of both lagoons and the Caribbean. Shoes, carts and clubs are available for rent, and there is a pro shop. Reservations are advised; phone (998) 883-1230 or (998) 883-1277.

Another championship 18-hole course is at the Iberostar Cancún, off Kukulcán at Km 17; phone (998) 881-8000 for reservations information. Greens fees vary depending on the season and are less for hotel guests.

There are tennis courts at the Hard Rock Hotel Cancún, the Hyatt Zilara Cancún and the Marriott Casamagna Cancún Resort, among others. A jogging and bicycling path—also used for roller blading—parallels the sidewalk along the northern (bay) side of Boulevard Kukulcán, extending as far as Cancún Point; a path also parallels the sidewalk along most of the southern half of the Hotel Zone.

If you're looking for fun places to go to relax—and are willing to pay the price—the spa at the Grand Fiesta Americana Coral Beach Cancún All Inclusive Spa Resort, Boulevard Kukulcán Km 9.5, offers hydrotherapy, massage and facial and body treatments, plus lap and plunge pools. An appointment is required; for information phone (998) 881-3200.

### Nightlife

Cancún provides something for everyone after dark, from rowdy spring break hangouts that are fun things to do with friends to traditional Mexican and Caribbean-themed dinner shows. Hotels also get in the act with lobby bars, happy-hour specials and varied entertainment. But it's the Hotel Zone dance clubs, the majority of them concentrated in the vicinity of Cancún Point, that give this resort destination its well-deserved reputation for wild nightlife.

Most clubs open around 9:30 or 10 p.m. and stay open as late as 6 a.m. Cover charges begin at about \$15 (U.S.), go up considerably if there's an open bar, and may be waived on certain nights in low season; at some places women are routinely admitted free of charge. Inquire about the dress code, as some don't allow jeans or shorts.

Coco Bongo, at Km 9.5 on Kukulcán (in the Forum-bythe-Sea shopping complex), draws young scenesters with a mix of recorded techno, hip-hop, house, salsa and '70s and '80s hits, as well as live bands. This cavernous space regularly packs in as many as 3,000 people. The cover charge, which includes an open bar, is about \$70 to \$80 (U.S.) and can reach upwards of \$200 for a front row experience, so it pays to take advantage of promotional coupons or hotel excursion deals; both are readily available depending on the season.

The City, also at Km 9.5 in front of Coco Bongo, brings in international DJs who spin pulsating dance music accompanied by dizzying light shows. With multiple bars and lounges and a beach club that has a wave pool, cabanas and food and drink service, this is a 24-hour hangout during spring break. An open bar ticket is available.

Dady'O, at Km 9.5 on Kukulcán (near the Cancún Center), is a granddaddy as far as longevity goes but is still very popular. It has six bars, tables on multiple levels, a VIP zone, a first-rate sound system, laser shows and appearances by visiting DJs. Additional entertainment ranges from themed parties to bikini contests. An open bar ticket is available.

There's more of the same—thumping beats, flashing lights and dance floors packed with partygoers dancing to deafening electronic music—at Mandala and Palazzo, clubs on opposite sides of Kukulcán at Km marker 9. La Vaguita Cancún, across the street from The City, has an open-air layout and music that ranges from Top 40s to hip-hop to Latin American.

For those who love to party there are plenty of places that combine food, music and a frathouse sense of fun. Two Mexican chains—Carlos 'n Charlie's, in the Forumby-the-Sea complex, and Señor Frog's, at Km 9.5 on Kukulcán—are noisy and invariably crowded, with waiters who get as crazy as the patrons.

All of these places target a younger crowd and are at their rowdiest during spring break, which begins in mid-February and lasts for about 2 months. Excessive alcohol consumption associated with partying is common; the legal drinking age in Mexico is 18 but is not uniformly enforced.

Somewhat less wild and more upscale is Noir Nightclub. in the Sunrise section at the Moon Palace Golf & Spa Resort complex (off Mex. 307 past the southern end of the Hotel Zone, about 8 kilometers/5 miles south of the airport). Lighting and audio systems are state of the art, and there are chic, comfortably furnished VIP areas where you

can chill out in style. It's open Tuesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday evenings until 3 a.m.

Nearby restaurants and hotel lobbies offer more places to hangout after dark. If you prefer a guieter evening, most of the resort hotels have a nightclub or lobby bar with jazz or other live music; the lobby lounge at The Ritz-Carlton, Cancún is particularly elegant.

For those who don't want to stand in line—or pay exorbitant cover charges three times over—the escorted "Cun Crawl" Party Hopper Tour does the work for you. It gets under way at 10 p.m. and hits three venues that vary according to the day of the week; the meeting point is at the entrance of the first club on the itinerary. The cost is \$80 (U.S.) per person Thurs.-Sat., \$75 Sun. and Tues.-Wed., which includes a reserved VIP seating area at each club. Transportation to the meeting point is not included, but clubs on the itinerary are within walking distance of each other. You must be over 18 to participate; a photo ID is required. Reservations can be booked online, or inquire at your hotel for additional information.

If you're wondering where to eat and see a show on your vacation. Hacienda Sisal Mexican Grill, at Km 13.5 on Kukulcán, presents weeknight buffet dinner shows featuring traditional Mexican folk dancing; phone (998) 848-8220 for schedule information. On nights when there is no show, dinner at this beautifully decorated restaurant-which recreates the look of a 19th-century Mexican haciendacomes complete with strolling mariachis.

Romantics searching for things for couples to do will enjoy a moonlit cruise. The Columbus Lobster Dinner Cruise sets sail for Nichupté Lagoon from the Aquatours Marina pier at Km 6.5 on Kukulcán (on the lagoon side, across from Playa Tortugas). A lobster or surf-and-turf dinner is served aboard the 60-foot galleon Columbus, along with dancing to live jazz.

Departures are Mon.-Fri. and Sun. at 5 and 8 p.m. (also Sat. in spring high season). Arriving 30 minutes before scheduled departure is recommended. Reservations are reguired; under 14 are not permitted. Transportation to the pier is not included. You can book reservations for this excursion through a local tour company, major hotels, or directly; phone 01 (800) 727-5391 (toll-free long distance within Mexico) or (866) 393-5158 (from the United States).

The Captain Hook Dinner Cruise departs from two locations: the Puerto Juárez Maritime Terminal, about 2 miles north of Ciudad Cancún via Avenida López Portillo (about 100 yards north of the Gran Puerto dock, departure point for UltraMar ferries to Isla Mujeres), and from the Captain Hook Marina at Boulevard Kukulcán Km marker 5. The cruise includes dinner and drinks aboard twin galleons that are "attacked" by pirates. The boats light up after the

sun sets, with live entertainment, music and dancing under the stars.

The cruise departs daily (except Jan. 1 and Christmas) at 7 p.m. and returns at 10:30. The cost ranges from \$70-\$102 depending on the dinner selection; \$35-\$51 (ages 6-12). Adult dinner prices include an open bar. Hotel pickup and drop-off is available for an additional charge. A surcharge fee of \$14 U.S. (\$5 for ages 6-12) must be paid upon arrival at either dock. For reservations and additional information phone (998) 849-4452.

For a special occasion evening, head down toward Playa del Carmen and catch the Cirque du Soleil production "Joya" at the Cirque du Soleil Theater, off Mex. 307 at Km marker 48 (about 20 miles south of Cancún International Airport). The 70-minute show delivers the eyepopping production values and performances for which Cirque du Soleil extravaganzas are known. Dinner and show and VIP dinner packages also are available.

Round-trip transportation is included for an additional cost; pickup points are at La Isla Shopping Village in the Hotel Zone and at Plaza Playacar in Playa del Carmen (within the Playacar Residential Complex). Reservations can be made through Cirque du Soleil or a local tour company, or check with your hotel for details about booking arrangements. For show times and additional information or to make reservations via Cirque du Soleil, phone 01 (800) 247-7837 (toll-free long distance within Mexico) or (844) 247-7837 (from the United States and Canada).

### Special Events

The Day of the Kings (Feast of the Epiphany, or El Día de Los Reyes) on Jan. 6 is a day of gift-giving. Local restaurants serve a King's Cake (Rosca de Reyes) that contains a small plastic Jesus doll (El Niño) inside. The person receiving the piece with the doll acts as a host on Candlemas (La Candeleria), the season's final Christmas celebration held the first week in February, when a meal of tamales and hot chocolate is served in homes and restaurants.

Carnaval, a fiesta in the spirit of Mardi Gras, is held the week preceding Ash Wednesday. Residents dress up in elaborate costumes, floats parade down the streets of Ciudad Cancún, and there are street parties featuring dancing, fireworks and regional foods and beverages. It's one of the many fun things to do with friends in Cancún.

On Mar. 21 the Vernal Equinox (Inicio Primavera) is observed at Chichén Itzá. When the late afternoon sun shines on El Castillo, a shadow remarkably reminiscent of a slithering serpent appears on the side of the pyramid. Thousands of people attend this event. Contact your local AAA travel advisor for help with planning your vacation packages.

As in all of Mexico, Independence Day (Patria de la Independencia) festivities take place Sept. 15-16 and include fireworks, a parade (on the 16th) and traditional food. Father Miguel Hidalgo's famous speech Grito de Dolores is re-enacted as people gather at midnight to shout out "Viva México!" It's a fun event to add to your family vacation.

The Eve of All Souls' Day, Oct. 31, is observed throughout the Yucatán by adorning headstones with wreaths of marigolds and placing candles and offerings of food and tequila at gravesites. Day of the Dead graveside and church ceremonies take place amid a party-like atmosphere Nov. 1 and 2, with bakeries doing big business turning out various skull-shaped pastries.

Interested in things to do around the holidays? Christmas celebrations begin 9 days prior to Dec. 25 and feature posadas (processions) of families and friends who take part in pastorelas (plays) portraying Jesus' birth, along with street fairs, piñata smashing and other festivities. One highlight of the season is the display of nativity scenes.

### CANCÚN, QUINTANA ROO



### ATELIER PLAYA MUJERES BOOK NOW 998/500-4800



Resort Hotel. Address: Prolongacion Bonampak S/N Mz 1 Lote RTH4 SM3 77400. Location: Oceanfront. Facility: The adults only, all-inclusive property features many amazing amenities. The rooms are abundantly spacious with upscale appointments, outdoor balconies and large bathrooms with deep soaker tubs. Meets AAA guest room security requirements. 608 units. 5 stories, interior corridors. Parking: valet only. Terms: age restrictions may apply. Amenities: safes. Dining: 9 restaurants, also, Maria Dolores By Edgar Nunez, see separate listing, nightclub, entertainment. Pool: heated outdoor. Activities: sauna, hot tub, steamroom, beach on-site, cabanas, self-propelled boats. marina, scuba diving, snorkeling, regulation golf, recreation programs, bicycles, trails, exercise room, spa. Guest Services: valet laundry, rental car service, area transportation.

























### BOOK NOW 998/891-4110



Contemporary Resort Hotel. Address: Blvd Kukulcan KM 115. Location: Oceanfront. Facility: The rooms at this upscale resort offer a ton of space, storage and seating. Additionally, the beds are ridiculously soft and there is a pillow and aroma therapy menu for you to choose from. Meets AAA guest room security requirements. 287 units. 14 stories, interior corridors. Parking: on-site and valet. Amenities: safes. Dining: 2 restaurants, entertainment. Pool: heated outdoor. Activities: sauna, hot tub, steamroom, beach on-site, cabanas, fishing, scuba diving, snorkeling, recreation programs, kids club, game room, lawn sports, exercise room, spa. Guest Services: valet laundry. (See ad starting on p. 60.)

FOUR DIAMOND **INSPECTED @** CLEAN



























BEACHSCAPE KIN HA VILLAS & SUITES BOOK NOW 998/891-5400



Condominium. Address: Blvd Kukulcan KM 85, Zona Hotelera 77500.





# IN CANCUN



### Lively. Luxurious. Family-Friendly.

Nestled in the heart of Cancun's Hotel Zone, Beach Palace offers ultimate relaxation combined with endless entertainment for families, couples & groups. Build sandcastles, lounge at the pool, savor gourmet dining, and marvel at the spectacular views of the Caribbean at this all-inclusive luxury resort.

### Carefree Indulgence. Luxurious Accomodations.

Beach Palace is all about comfort, convenience, and luxury. Open the door to accommodations boasting a double whirlpool tub, daily refreshed mini-bar, in-room liquor dispensers, and more. Kick back and ease into beachfront bliss.

### The Best Of Beach Palace

Whether you are traveling with family or someone special, Beach Palace is playfully chic and gloriously unpredictable, allowing you to indulge in gorgeous beaches and spectacular views no matter where you look. You'll find even more excitement along the bustling Hotel Zone with a wealth of shops and activities, all within walking distance.

### A Taste Of Perfection

Savor masterfully prepared dishes from around the world: modern fusions of Pan-Asian flavors at Momo; delicious Mexican cuisine at Tequila; authentic tastes of Italy at Tavola; and mouthwatering grilled dishes at Smokehouse. Plus, gourmet snacks, coffee, homemade ice cream, chocolates & desserts at Sweet & Coffee.

### The Happy Hour You Need

When it's time to lift your glass, you'll find plenty of options. Sip world-class cocktails, spirits, and beers, or savor sumptuous snacks poolside at our rooftop Sky Bar; get your game on at our Stadium Bar; and order your favorite drinks and snack at the Pool Bar.

### **Treat Yourself To Bliss**

Paradise can be found inside at our serene spa. Replenish your natural essence with invigorating treatments designed for singles or couples. Along with state-of-the-art facilities, you can choose from signature services, such as massages, facials, wraps & herbal rituals.

### **Always Something To Do**

**Beach Palace** offers a world of activities for all ages, both around the resort and throughout the Yucatan peninsula. You can lounge poolside or choose a beach chair overlooking waters so blue you'll swear the view can't be real. At night, enjoy live, Vegas-style performances, from musical acts and an aquatic circus to awe-mazing fire shows.

#### For Kids & Teens

The Dreamery is a new concept designed to ensure the youngest guests have the best vacation experience. Kids of all ages will have a blast, with games, activities & kid-friendly amenities. Plus, they will love The Playroom (ages 4-12).

### Wander. Explore. Indulge.

Take advantage of the fascinating wonders of the Yucatan. Explore ancient Mayan ruins at Tulum or Chichen Itza, a UNESCO® World Heritage Site. Indulge in luxury sails or yacht tours. Book an exclusive fishing exhibition. Or explore the Hotel Zone's many shops and more.

Beach Palace is a family-friendly resort, part of The Palace Company, where you can experience the best of Cancun and the Yucatan peninsula.









BELOVED PLAYA MUJERES BOOK NOW 998/872-8730



Boutique Resort Hotel, Address: Vialidad Paseo Muieres, Mz 1 Lote 10 SM 3, Location: Oceanfront. Facility: Contemporary and chic, this intimate resort is a peaceful refuge. These spacious upscale suites all have in-room hot tubs and open onto terraces. Some suites have private swimming pools. Meets AAA quest room security requirements. 109 units, some efficiencies. 4 stories, exterior corridors. Parking: on-site and valet. Terms: age restrictions may apply. Amenities: safes. Dining: 4 restaurants, entertainment. Pool: outdoor, heated outdoor. Activities: sauna, hot tub, steamroom, beach on-site, self-propelled boats, marina, fishing, scuba diving, snorkeling, recreation programs, bicycles, lawn sports, trails, health club, spa. Guest Services: valet laundry.



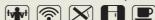




















BREATHLESS CANCUN SOUL RESORT AND SPA BOOK NOW 998/689-2500





AAA Benefit: Members save up to 10% and earn World of Hyatt points when booking AAA/CAA rates!

Resort Hotel. Address: Blvd Kukulcan KM 45 Zona Hotelera 77500. Location: Oceanfront. Facility: The rooms are luxuriously appointed with unique color-changing headboards, soft bedding spacious bathrooms and outdoor balconies with amazing views. Meets AAA quest room security requirements. 429 units. 19 stories, interior corridors. Bath: shower only. Parking: on-site and valet. Terms: age restrictions may apply. Amenities: safes. Dining: 7 restaurants, nightclub, entertainment. Pool: heated outdoor. Activities: sauna, hot tub, steamroom, beach on-site, cabanas, self-propelled boats, fishing, scuba diving, snorkeling, recreation programs, bicycles, lawn sports, exercise room, spa. Guest Services: valet laundry, rental car service.





























CANOPY BY HILTON CANCUN LA ISLA BOOK NOW 998/689-1193



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SAVE Hotel. Address: Blvd Kukulcan KM 125 Zona Hotelera 77500.



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### CATALONIA GRAND COSTA MUJERES ALL SUITES & SPA

BOOK NOW 998/881-2300



Resort Hotel. Address: Boulevard Costa Muieres. Lote 6. Mz 77400. Location: Oceanfront. Facility: The resort houses an impressive shopping and dining district on site. The rooms offer separate seating areas, soft bedding, walk-in closets and outdoor balcony's with exceptional views. Meets AAA guest room security requirements. 496 units. 4 stories, interior corridors. Amenities: safes. Dining: 11 restaurants, nightclub, entertainment. Pool: outdoor. Activities: sauna, steamroom, beach on-site, cabanas, self-propelled boats, fishing, scuba diving, snorkeling, recreation programs, kids club, game room, health club, spa. Guest Services: valet laundry, rental car service.

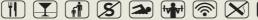




















CITY EXPRESS BY MARRIOTT BOOK NOW 998/881-1930



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SAVE Hotel. Address: Ave Nichupte SM 8 M4 L1 77500.



COURTYARD BY MARRIOTT CANCUN AIRPORT

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SAVE Hotel. Address: Blvd Luis Donaldo Colosio KM 125 77580.



### CROWN PARADISE CLUB CANCUN BOOK NOW 998/848-9000



Resort Hotel. Address: Blvd Kukulcan KM 185 77500. Location: Oceanfront. Facility: Among Cancun's ultimate family resorts, this all-inclusive was built for kids and the young at heart. Plentiful activities include a children's theater, arts and crafts, and multiple pool areas. 617 units, some two and three bedrooms. 7-8 stories, interior corridors. Amenities: safes. Dining: 6 restaurants, entertainment. Pool: outdoor, indoor. Activities: hot tub, steamroom, miniature golf, tennis, recreation programs, kids club, playground, game room, exercise room, spa. Guest Services: valet laundry.

























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DREAMS NATURA RESORT & SPA BOOK NOW

998/689-0400





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Hotel. Address: SM 31 MZ 03 Lote 101-21 KM 332 Carr 77500. Location: Oceanfront. Facility: Located on the gorgeous Caribbean

sea and surrounded by the Mayan jungle, this resort offers a unique natural experience. Well-appointed spacious guest rooms welcome you with an abundance of features. Meets AAA guest room security requirements. 553 units, some two bedrooms. 8 stories, interior corridors. Amenities: safes. Dining: 8 restaurants, nightclub, entertainment. Pool: heated outdoor. Activities: sauna, hot tub, steamroom, beach on-site, cabanas, fishing, scuba diving, snorkeling, tennis, recreation programs, kids club, playground, game room, lawn sports, exercise room, spa. Guest Services: valet laundry. Affiliated with Dreams Resorts & Spas.





























DREAMS PLAYA MUJERES GOLF & SPA RESORT BOOK NOW

998/283-3600





AAA Benefit: Members save up to 10% and earn World of Hyatt points when booking AAA/CAA rates!

Resort Hotel. Address: Prolongation Bonampak S/N Punta SAM CP

77400. Location: Oceanfront. Facility: This sprawling resort offers a private beach and several pool areas to lounge by. There are ample activities to keep the entire family busy, the interactive dolphin habitat is a must see! Meets AAA guest room security requirements. 502 units, some two bedrooms and kitchens. 5 stories, exterior corridors. Parking: on-site and valet. Amenities: safes. Dining: 9 restaurants, nightclub, entertainment. Pool: heated outdoor. Activities: sauna, hot tub, steamroom, beach on-site, cabanas, self-propelled boats, fishing, scuba diving, snorkeling, regulation golf, miniature golf, recreation programs, kids club, bicycles, game room, lawn sports, exercise room, spa. Guest Services: valet laundry, rental car service. (See ad starting on p. 66.)

































DREAMS SANDS CANCUN RESORT & SPA BOOK NOW 998/848-7600



AAA Benefit: Members save up to 10% and earn World of Hyatt points when booking AAA/CAA rates!

SAVE Resort Hotel. Address: Blvd Kukulkan, KM 85 77500.

### LUXURY FAMILY ESCAPE



### Dreams Playa Mujeres Golf & Spa Resort

Dreams Playa Mujeres Golf & Spa Resort is set along a private stretch of beach only minutes away from downtown Cancun, but a world away in a serene gated community. Guests can enjoy 65,000 sq. ft. of swimming pools and a water park on-site. Preferred greens fees at the Playa Mujeres Golf Course and full access to the facilities at Secrets Playa Mujeres (adults-only) next door are also included in the Unlimited-Luxury® experience. Unique and luxurious accommodations include second floor swim out suites, two bedroom villas and the Paramount Suite with an ocean view terrace perfect for private wedding ceremonies.



### **Accomodations**

Dreams Playa Mujeres Golf & Spa Resort boasts 502 spacious suites with stunning views of the ocean, pool or garden, access to a private furnished terrace with either a whirlpool or a private pool and more.

Amenities include:

- ·One king or two queen-size beds
- · 48" flat screen satellite TV
- ·Hot tub on the terrace (except for swim out and ocean front suites)
- · Blackout drapes
- · Ceiling fan
- · Direct dial telephone
- · Alarm clock radio with capability to connect several electronic devices
- · Electronic laptop-size safe
- · Daily refreshed mini-bar with beer, soft drinks, juices and bottled water
- · Nespresso coffee machine
- · Hair dryer and vanity mirror
- · Rain shower and double vanities and more.

### **Preferred Club**

Preferred Club guests enjoy enhanced amenities including: Personalized checkin and checkout · Private Preferred Club Lounge · Daily continental breakfast service, afternoon hot and cold hors d'oeuvres, exquisite desserts and fine liquors served in the lounge · À la carte breakfast at Maris · Access to the Lazy River at the Preferred Villa Section · Upgraded mini-bar service and bathroom amenities · Complimentary computer access in the lounge · Preferred Club area on the beach with exclusive access to the Hideaway bar · Bali beds in the pool and beach area.

### **Entertainment activities**

Vacations at Dreams Playa Mujeres have exceptional evening entertainment options offered daily, including spectacular live performances, big screen movies on the beach and themed parties. Dreams Playa Mujeres Golf & Spa Resort offers a wide variety of activities including: The Explorer's Club for kids from 3 to 12 years and the CoreZone for teenagers from 13 to 17 year. More activities: Beach and pool volleyball · Kayaks · Archery · Tennis courts (available for adults 18+ at neighboring Secrets Playa Mujeres) · Padel · Pickleball · Scuba diving lessons\* · Jet skis\* · Dolphins Habitat\* and more.

### Gastronomy

Dreams Playa Mujeres will offer 10 dining options, including 6 à la carte restaurants, 1 buffet, 1 grill, 1 fast-casual eatery, and 1 café with an ice cream parlor. Or stay in and order room service available 24 hrs. It's all available at any hour day or night. Enjoy from 13 bars and lounges, serving international and domestic topshelf spirits, ranging from swim-up to a nightly music lounge. Two of the bars are non-alcoholic and especially designed for teens and tweens.

### **Dreams Spa**

For those quests seeking a sanctuary for the senses, the Dreams Spa by Pevonia® will offer a sublime atmosphere inspired by Mayan culture, creating a refreshing, invigorating and peaceful experience. Private showers, whirlpool baths, treatment rooms, a relaxation lounge, and a Watsu® pool for underwater massages are available.

### Weddings

Our dedicated wedding planners specialize in ensuring that every detail is carefully attended to and personalized with meticulous attention. We offer a wide range of spectacular ocean-view venues for ceremonies, cocktails, and receptions, complemented by various packages that you can explore on our website. From romantic sunset ceremonies to vibrant parties under the stars, our goal is to make your special day unforgettable.\*









DREAMS VISTA CANCUN GOLF AND SPA RESORT BOOK NOW 998/881-5333





AAA Benefit: Members save up to 10% and earn World of Hyatt points when booking AAA/CAA rates!

Resort Hotel. Address: Lote 1-03 Mz 12, Sm 84. Location: Oceanfront. Facility: The property offers numerous fun activities for

every age. Rooms are spacious with soft bedding, outdoor balconies, oversized flat-panel TVs and enormous bathrooms with walk-in showers. Meets AAA guest room security requirements. 416 units. 14 stories, interior corridors. Parking: valet only. Amenities: safes. Dining: 7 restaurants, nightclub, entertainment. Pool: heated outdoor. Activities: sauna, hot tub, steamroom, beach on-site, cabanas, scuba diving, snorkeling, regulation golf, recreation programs, kids club, game room, lawn sports, exercise room, spa. Guest Services: valet laundry, area transportation.





























EXCELLENCE PLAYA MUJERES BOOK NOW 998/872-8600



Resort Hotel. Address: Prolongacion Bonampak Lt Terreno. Location: Oceanfront. Facility: This expansive, all-inclusive resort offers multiple pool areas, many restaurants and nightly entertainment. The luxurious suites are spacious and all have in-room hot tubs and balconies or patios. Meets AAA guest room security requirements. 450 units. 1-5 stories, exterior corridors. Parking: on-site and valet. Terms: age restrictions may apply. Amenities: safes. Dining: 11 restaurants, entertainment. Pool: outdoor, heated outdoor. Activities: sauna, hot tub, steamroom, beach on-site, cabanas, self-propelled boats, fishing, scuba diving, snorkeling, tennis, recreation programs, bicycles, game room, trails, health club, spa. Guest Services: valet laundry.



























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SAVE Hotel, Address: Blvd Luis Donaldo Colosio KM 125 77580.



FAIRFIELD INN & SUITES BY MARRIOTT CANCUN DOWNTOWN

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998/604-9540



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SAVE Hotel. Address: Av Tulum, Manzana 14, Lote 2 77500.



FIESTA AMERICANA CONDESA CANCUN ALL INCLUSIVE

**BOOK NOW** 998/881-4200

INSPECTED @ CLEAN

Resort Hotel. Address: Blvd Kukulcan KM 165.



### FINEST PLAYA MUJERES BOOK NOW 998/872-8180



Resort Hotel. Address: Calle Vialidad Paseo Mujeres MZ1. Location: Oceanfront. Facility: Located in fast-developing Playa Mujeres, this large resort features a trendy, minimalist design in both public areas and guest suites. The stretch of beach is great for walking and swimming. Meets AAA quest room security requirements. 450 units, some two bedrooms. 4 stories, interior/exterior corridors. Parking: on-site and valet. Amenities: safes. Dining: 13 restaurants, nightclub, entertainment. Pool: outdoor, heated outdoor. Activities: sauna, hot tub, steamroom, beach on-site, cabanas, self-propelled boats, fishing, scuba diving, snorkeling, tennis, recreation programs, kids club, bicycles, playground, game room, lawn sports, trails, health club, spa. Guest Services: valet 



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SAVE Hotel. Address: Ave Tulum Mz 1 Lt 2 SM 12 77500.



### GRAND PALLADIUM COSTA MUJERES RESORT & SPA

BOOK NOW 998/868-5200



Resort Hotel. Address: Vialidad Paseo Mujeres 77400. Location: Oceanfront. Facility: This massive resort offers an entire village, accessible only to guests, which is filled with dining and shopping venues. The rooms are spacious with ample seating and tons of storage space. Meets AAA guest room security requirements. 673 units, some two bedrooms. 3-4 stories, interior corridors. Parking: on-site and valet. Amenities: safes. Dining: 9 restaurants, entertainment. Pool: heated outdoor. Activities: sauna, hot tub, steamroom, beach on-site, cabanas, self-propelled boats, fishing, scuba diving, snorkeling, tennis, recreation programs, kids club, playground, game room, lawn sports, health club, spa. Guest Services: valet laundry, area transportation.























GRAND PARK ROYAL CANCUN CARIBE BOOK NOW

998/848-7800

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Resort Hotel, Address: Blvd Kukulcan KM 105 77500.









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HARD ROCK HOTEL CANCUN BOOK NOW 998/881-3600



Resort Hotel. Address: Blvd Kukulcan KM 145 77500. Location: Oceanfront. Facility: This all-inclusive, rock 'n' roll-themed resort features lagoon- or ocean-view rooms with balconies, plus an extensive selection of fun resort activities. The guitar-shaped driveway is quite a sight. Meets AAA quest room security requirements. 600 units, some two bedrooms. 8-12 stories, interior corridors. Parking: on-site and valet. Amenities: safes. Some: video games. Dining: 6 restaurants, entertainment. Pool: outdoor. Activities: sauna, hot tub, steamroom, beach on-site, fishing, scuba diving, snorkeling, tennis, recreation programs, kids club, playground, game room, exercise room, spa. Guest **Services:** valet laundry.

































HILTON CANCUN, AN ALL-INCLUSIVE RESORT BOOK NOW 998/432-0300





AAA Benefit: Members save up to 10% and earn Honors points when booking AAA/CAA rates!

Hotel. Address: Carr Federal Libre 307 Cancun Tulum. Facility: This recently opened all-inclusive resort features an abundance of comforts. Spacious guest rooms offer an array of upgraded amenities including

premier bedding and good-sized furnished balconies. 715 units. 7 stories, interior corridors. Parking: on-site and valet. Amenities: safes. Dining: 6 restaurants, entertainment. Pool: heated outdoor. Activities: self-propelled boats, fishing, scuba diving, snorkeling, recreation programs, exercise room, spa. Guest Services: valet laundry.







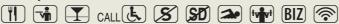
























HILTON GARDEN INN CANCUN AIRPORT BOOK NOW 998/372-9860



AAA Benefit: Members save up to 10% and earn Honors points when booking AAA/CAA rates!

SAVE Hotel. Address: Chetumal KM 22.

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HOTEL PRESIDENTE INTERCONTINENTAL CANCUN

**BOOK NOW** 998/848-8700

Resort Hotel. Address: Blvd Kukulcan KM 75 77500.

### HYATT ZILARA CANCUN BOOK NOW 998/881-5600







HYATT ZILARA AAA Benefit: Members save up to 10% and earn World of Hyatt points when booking AAA/CAA rates!

Resort Hotel. Address: Blvd Kukulcan KM 115, Zona Hotelera 77513. Location: Oceanfront. Facility: Upscale and adult-oriented, this all-inclusive resort offers many dining options and a well-appointed spa. Enjoy the extensive fitness center and a lap pool that has an incredible lagoon view. Meets AAA guest room security requirements. 310 units. 8 stories, interior/exterior corridors. Parking: valet only. Terms: age restrictions may apply. Amenities: safes. Dining: 6 restaurants, entertainment. Pool: heated outdoor. Activities: sauna, hot tub, steamroom, beach on-site, cabanas, fishing, scuba diving, snorkeling, recreation programs, game room, health club, spa. Guest Services: valet laundry. 

### HYATT ZIVA CANCUN BOOK NOW 998/848-7000









Resort Hotel. Address: Punta Cancun S/N 77500. Location: Oceanfront. Facility: This hotel sits between two great swimming beaches and is within walking distance to local nightlife and shopping venues. Rooms are spacious and trendy, featuring plenty of upscale amenities. Meets AAA guest room security requirements. 547 units, some two bedrooms. 5-17 stories, interior/exterior corridors. Parking: on-site and valet. Amenities: safes. Dining: 15 restaurants, entertainment. Pool: heated outdoor. Activities: sauna, hot tub, steamroom, beach on-site, cabanas, self-propelled boats, fishing, scuba diving, snorkeling, tennis, recreation programs, kids club, playground, game room, lawn sports, exercise room, spa. Guest Services: valet laundry.























### IBEROSTAR SELECTION CANCUN GOLF AND SPA RESORT BOOK NOW

998/881-8000



FOUR DIAMOND **INSPECTED**  CLEAN Oceanfront. Facility: A dramatic pyramid-shaped building houses the majority of the guest rooms. There are also secluded villas along the spectacular beach, many of which have

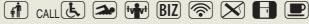
Resort Hotel. Address: Blvd Kukulcan KM 17. Zona Hotelera 77500. Location:

their own individual swim-up pools. Meets AAA quest room security requirements. 426 units. 2-9 stories, interior/exterior corridors. Parking: on-site and valet. Amenities: safes. Dining: 6 restaurants, entertainment. Pool: outdoor, heated outdoor. Activities: sauna, hot tub, steamroom, beach on-site, cabanas, fishing, scuba diving, snorkeling, regulation golf, tennis, recreation programs, kids club, playground, game room, lawn sports, exercise room, spa. Guest Services: valet laundry.





















#### KEMPINSKI HOTEL CANCUN BOOK NOW 998/881-0808



INSPECTED @ CLEAN

Resort Hotel, Address: Retorno del Rev No 36, Zona Hotelera 77500, Location: Oceanfront. Facility: A refined ambience enhances the allure of this top-of-the-line property. The guest rooms offer luxurious bedding and ornate furnishings. Bathrooms feature beautiful marble counters and flooring. Meets AAA guest room security requirements. 363 units. 9 stories, interior corridors. Parking: valet only. Amenities: safes. Dining: 4 restaurants, also, The Club Grill, Fantino, see separate listings. Pool: heated outdoor. Activities: sauna, hot tub, steamroom, beach on-site, fishing, scuba diving, snorkeling, tennis, recreation programs, kids club, playground, exercise room, spa. Guest Services: valet laundry.

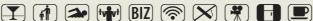




























KRYSTAL GRAND CANCUN BOOK NOW 998/891-5555

HREE DIAMOND INSPECTED @ CLEAN Hotel. Address: Blvd Kukulcan KM 85 77500.



#### LE BLANC SPA RESORT BOOK NOW 998/881-4740





Contemporary Resort Hotel. Address: Blvd Kukulcan KM 10, Zona Hotelera 77500. Location: Oceanfront. Facility: Renovated in 2019, this stunning all-inclusive resort caters to adults only. Rooms offer luxurious amenities, butler service, aromatherapy, a pillow menu and 55-inch smart TVs that can stream movies. Meets AAA guest room security requirements. 260 units. 9 stories, interior corridors. Parking: on-site and valet. Terms: age restrictions may apply. Amenities: safes. Dining: 6 restaurants, entertainment. Pool: heated outdoor. Activities: sauna, hot tub, steamroom, beach on-site, cabanas, fishing, scuba diving, snorkeling, recreation programs, exercise room, spa. Guest Services: valet laundry. (See ad starting on p. 74.)



























# Make the Connection

Click on any **BOOK NOW** icon to book your hotel stay on AAA.com and save money.

Find this symbol for further information or relevant contact.









#### The 5-Diamond Excellence Of Le Blanc Spa Resort Cancun

All resorts desire a coveted 5 Diamond rating from AAA. Le Blanc Spa Resort Cancun continues to earn such marks year after year (14 years & counting). This abundant collection results in the most upscale amenities and exclusive service beyond the ordinary. Just minutes away from Cancun International Airport and a world away from the ordinary, this adults-only, all-inclusive oasis beckons you to surrender to every whim.

#### The Art Of Le Blanc Hospitality

Discover the pinnacle of elegance at the Le Blanc Spa Resort Cancun, where adults-only, all-inclusive luxury means ultra-luxe amenities, exquisite flavors, and incredible settings along the Mexican Caribbean. Modern decor, breathtaking vistas & white-glove pampering will transport you to a place of ultimate relaxation and wellness, where the Yucatan peninsula meets the aquamarine waters of the Caribbean.

Let's explore how you can elevate your stay.

#### Luxury Accommodations

Experience sheer luxury in our selection of 259 guest accommodations, with spectacular views of the picturesque turquoise waters of Cancun or the stunning Nichupte Lagoon. Unwind with lavish comforts that include personal butler service, plush bedding, a pillow and comfort menu, daily replenished minibars, in-room liquor dispensers stocked with top-shelf brands, a welcome bottle of wine, high-speed Wi-Fi, Smart TV with Chromecast®, BVLGARI® bathroom amenities, Lavazza® coffee maker & more to replenish and savor every moment.

#### Savor Perfection With Every Bite & Sip

Go on a culinary voyage of international cuisines, each depicting a different story from chefs who share a passion for culinary greatness. Sip premier wines & cocktails crafted by master hands across five bars and enjoy in-room dining 24 hours a day.

Journey through six restaurants filled with exquisite flavors. Taste French culinary traditions at Lumière, classic Italian cuisine at Bella, innovative Japanese fusions at Yama, mouthwatering steaks at Blanc, Mexican favorites at Terraza & delicious healthy eating at Pure. You can also sip & savor gourmet coffee, handmade chocolates & desserts at K'akau, and homemade ice cream, now including vegan flavors, at Glacé.

All restaurants and premium cava by the glass and top-shelf creations are included in every stay, featuring a number of high-end labels.





#### Spa & Wellness Activities

Achieve harmony in the serenity of the Mexican Caribbean at our award-winning spa, where we seamlessly blend traditional healing techniques and Mayan-inspired rituals for a natural feeling of relaxation and rejuvenation. We offer 19 suites for massages and signature treatments, an herbal steam room, chromotherapy, a sauna, and a soothing relaxation lounge. You can also improve your overall health with wellness activities like our hydrotherapy journey, paddle & Hatha yoga, pilates, aqua spinning, TRX, personal training & more.

#### Uncover A World Of Luxury & Adventure

There is a world of discoveries in and around Cancun. We offer an array of Blanc Experiences, from cultural tours to Chichen Itza or Tulum and luxury yacht tours along the coast to exploring underwater caves or diving along glorious coral reefs. Plus, play a round of golf or simply lounge in our stunning infinity pool with a signature cocktail in hand.





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LIVE AQUA CANCUN BOOK NOW 998/881-7600



Contemporary Resort Hotel. Address: Blvd Kukulcan KM 125. Zona Hotelera 77500. Location: Oceanfront. Facility: A beautiful aroma, with a hint of mint, immediately soothes you upon entering this resort. The spacious rooms offer luxurious bedding, ample seating, and bathrooms with oversize shower heads. Meets AAA guest room security requirements. 371 units, some two bedrooms. 9 stories, interior corridors. Parking: on-site and valet. Terms: age restrictions may apply. Amenities: safes. Dining: 8 restaurants, nightclub, entertainment. Pool: outdoor, heated outdoor. Activities: sauna, hot tub, steamroom, beach on-site, cabanas, fishing, scuba diving, snorkeling, tennis, recreation programs, game room, lawn sports, exercise room, spa. Guest Services: valet laundry. Affiliated with Fiesta Americana Hotels.



























MOON PALACE CANCUN BOOK NOW 998/881-6000



Resort Hotel. Address: Carr Cancun-Chetumal KM 340 77500. Location: Oceanfront. Facility: This resort, the largest in Mexico, offers everything you could possibly desire for your dream vacation. The guest rooms are spacious, and the in-room hot tub is a special treat. 2052 units. 3 stories, interior/exterior corridors. Parking: on-site and valet. Amenities: safes. Dining: 16 restaurants, nightclub, entertainment. Pool: outdoor, heated outdoor, heated indoor. Activities: sauna, hot tub, steamroom, beach on-site, cabanas, fishing, scuba diving, snorkeling, regulation golf, miniature golf, tennis, recreation programs, kids club, bicycles, playground, game room, trails, exercise room, spa. Guest **Services:** valet laundry, rental car service, area transportation. (See ad starting on p. 78.)



























Why You Should Travel With Someone You Trust®





# TWO PARADISES TO EXPLORE







With a plethora of energy, luxury, and endless possibilities, Moon Palace Cancun offers something for every mood and every age and interest. There are more restaurants than you can visit in one vacation, as well as bars, pools, and countless activities at this dynamic, all-inclusive resort.

#### Two Sections. Two Distinct Personalities.

Two distinct sides make up Moon Palace Cancun: Sunrise is the land of surprises and excitement, while Nizuc is a place for relaxation. In addition to lavish accommodations, you'll have access to the best all-inclusive amenities, including a daily-refreshed minibar, a liquor dispenser, double whirlpool tub, plush beds, luxurious bath amenities, 24-hour room service and much more.

#### **World-Class Dining**

There are so many ways to satisfy your cravings at Moon Palace Cancun with 17 unlimited dining options, all included in every stay. Some guest favorites include authentic Mayan fare at **Riviera Maya**, bursts of Pan-Asian flavors at **Momo**, a tour of Indian classics at **Agra**, the "Art of Churrasco" at **Arrecifes** and classic Italian dishes at **Trattoria**, with many more options to choose from.

Casual dining options include burgers, pizza & barbecue, plus gourmet coffee, ice cream, chocolates & desserts at **Cafe Bistro** and **Sweet & Coffee**. No matter which eatery you choose, you might need another vacation to try them all.







### **Lift Your Glass & Party**

Dance until early, enjoy your favorite beer with the game, or opt for laid-back vibes and live music. The choice is yours.

With sophisticated **Lobby Bars** in Nizuc and Sunrise, a casual outdoor bar where swings replace bar stools, a **British-style Pub** and James Bond-style **Sky Bar**, as well as **Pool & Swim-Up Bars**, you'll find the perfect cocktail, wine, or beer to suit your taste. Plus, Moon Palace puts even more "life" in "nightlife" at **Noir** Nightclub.

#### So Much To Do

Moon Palace Cancun will keep everyone interested with multiple pools, a **FlowRider®** Double Wave Simulator, pristine beaches, pickleball, tennis, basketball, skating and non-motorized water sports—all included! Plus, you can treat yourself to a round on the onsite 27-hole Jack Nicklaus Signature golf course.

#### **Discover The Yucatan**

Discover one of the world's seven wonders or try anything from zip-lining to snorkeling in the underwater world—there is something in store for everyone. Let your adventurous spirit lead the way, and Palace Discoveries will handle the rest.

#### **Find Your Inner Glow**

At our onsite world-class spas you'll find everything you need to relax and let go completely. Choose from various signature massages, facials & beauty services in one of 35 individual and couples treatment rooms, and even a signature massage using golf balls.

#### For Kids & Teens

**The Dreamery** is a new concept designed to ensure the youngest guests get the most out of their vacation. Your kids will love the Playroom and immersive video & interactive games at Wired Lounge, as well as an exciting program of engless activities

Moon Palace Cancun is an all-inclusive family resort by The Palace Company, where you can experience your best vacation yet.









# FOR ANY OCCASION









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#### MOON PALACE THE GRAND CANCUN BOOK NOW 998/881-6100



Hotel. Address: Carr Federal 307 KM 77500. Location: Oceanfront. Facility: This luxurious all-inclusive resort boasts an abundance of 1st class features including a water park, multiple kids gaming areas, a one-of-a-kind spa, and a 27-hole golf course. 1302 units, some two and three bedrooms. 3 stories, interior corridors. Parking: valet only. Amenities: safes. Some: video games. Dining: 9 restaurants, nightclub, entertainment. Pool: heated outdoor, heated indoor. Activities: beach on-site, motor boats, marina, fishing, scuba diving, snorkeling, regulation golf, miniature golf, recreation programs, health club, spa. Guest Services: valet laundry. (See ad starting on p. 82.)



























#### NIZUC RESORT & SPA BOOK NOW 998/891-5700



Resort Hotel. Address: Blvd Kukulcan KM 2126, Punta Nizuc 77500. Location: Oceanfront. Facility: This beautiful and expansive resort features rustic and elegant Mayan inspired décor. The guest rooms are very spacious with many custom furnishings and luxurious features. Meets AAA quest room security requirements. 274 units, some two bedrooms and efficiencies. 1-5 stories, interior/exterior corridors. Parking: on-site and valet. Amenities: safes. Dining: 5 restaurants, also, Indochine, La Punta Grill & Lounge, Ramona, see separate listings. Pool: heated outdoor. Activities: sauna, hot tub. steamroom, beach on-site, cabanas, self-propelled boats, boat dock, fishing, scuba diving, snorkeling, tennis, recreation programs, kids club, playground, trails, exercise room, spa. Guest Services: valet laundry.

































PARADISUS CANCUN RESORT BOOK NOW 998/881-1100



Resort Hotel. Address: Blvd Kukulcan KM 165 77500.





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AAA Vacations® delivers value with every itinerary.

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# THE START OF GRAND VACATIONS







#### MOON PALACE THE GRAND-CANCUN

This luxury resort in Cancun, will take your vacation to the next level. Relax in lush accommodations. Cool off in one of nine pools. Enjoy all-inclusive dining in 17 restaurants & cafes or unlimited drinks at one of six bars. Enjoy the amazing world-class Spa or splash down in an exciting onsite Water Park.

Regardless of age, fitness level, or interest, there is something for everyone. The only question is, what will you choose first?

## Grand All-Inclusive Accommodations & Amenities

Moon Palace The Grand-Cancun offers spacious rooms and luxury suites, along with sumptuous beds, whirlpool tubs, and all-inclusive amenities, including a fully stocked minibar, a liquor dispenser, complimentary bottle of wine, and nightly turndown service. You can also enjoy the best sleep of your life with aromatherapy and pillow menus.

Welcome to the next frontier of opulence along the beaches of the Mexican Caribbean.

#### Embark On A Grand Tour Of The World's Cuisine

Satisfy every craving at The Grand: contemporary Mexican flavors at **Casa Mia**; South American delights at **Cusco & The Grill**; Certified Angus Beef® at **JC Steakhouse**; captivating tastes of Italy at **Tavola**; reimagined Japanese favorites at **Jade**; French haute cuisine at **Le Château**; golden world of "mezze" at **Habibi**; and a magical dining experience for kids at **Circus**.

There are also casual cafes serving tapas, tacos & snacks, plus gourmet coffee, ice cream, chocolates & desserts at **Boulangerie**. Be sure to check out the resort's newest experience, **Nativo Roasting House**, where you can see how coffee and cocoa beans transform into delicious drinks & treats.

Plus, all guests of The Grand have access to an additional 16 dining options at Moon Palace Cancun.







#### Let's Grab A Drink

Get down and dance until the early hours. Enjoy a drink, cheer on your favorite team, or enjoy laid-back vibes and live music.

At the new **Kassette Karaoke Bar**, belt out your favorite tunes on stage or choose a more sophisticated setting at the **Lobby Bar**. You don't even have to get out of the pool as you can order a new drink from **Swim-Up Bars**.

There are also spaces designed exclusively for adults. Find the bookcase and enter through the hidden door to **The Library**, an adults-only speakeasy bar. Lounge or groove to a live DJ at **Unique Day Club**, the adults-only pool bar. Or head to **Unique Night Club** where the action continues long after the sun goes down.

#### **Enjoy Grand Pampering**

The world-class spa at The Grand offers unrivaled indulgence, relaxation, and tranquility. Choose from various massages, signature treatments, facials, and beauty treatments, plus healing hydrotherapy.

#### Wait... There's More

In addition to multiple pools, you can play at the onsite **Water Park** (included in your stay), with multiple slides, a lazy river, a kids' area, and a **ProFlow® Triple Wave Simulator**. You can also find the **Ninth Pin Bowling Alley**, a **Jack Nicklaus Signature golf course**, and many other activities.

#### Kids Will Have A Grand Time

You'll never hear the words "I'm bored" from your kids here.

**The Dreamery** is a kid-centric concept, designed to ensure the best vacation experience for the resort's youngest guests. Other kid-friendly amenities will ensure kids have a blast, including The Playroom and immersive video & interactive games at the Wired Game Lounge.

#### **Grand Ways To Explore The Yucatan**

There is something in store for everyone with **Palace Discoveries**, from zip-lining to snorkeling in the underwater world. Let your adventurous spirit lead the way, and **Moon Palace The Grand-Cancun** will handle the rest.

Moon Palace The Grand – Cancun, an all-inclusive luxury resort for families, couples, and groups, is part of The Palace Company, and where you can experience your grandest vacation yet.

#### PLANET HOLLYWOOD CANCUN, AUTOGRAPH COLLECTION BY **BOOK NOW** 998/580-9880 **MARRIOTT**



AUTOGRAPH AAA Benefit: Members save 5% or more and earn Marriott COLLECTION® Bonvoy™ points when booking AAA/CAA rates!

HOTELS

Resort Hotel. Address: Punta Sam, Carr Mza 002, Lt 7 77400. Location: Oceanfront. Facility: Rooms offer upscale appointments with

ample storage space and private outdoor seating areas. The bathrooms feature Hollywood style vanity mirrors and multiple sinks with colorful accent lighting. 1028 units, some two bedrooms and kitchens. 4-5 stories, interior corridors. Parking: on-site and valet. Amenities: safes. Dining: 13 restaurants, nightclub, entertainment. Pool: outdoor. Activities: sauna, hot tub, steamroom, beach on-site, cabanas, motor boats, self-propelled boats, fishing, scuba diving, snorkeling, miniature golf, tennis, recreation programs, kids club, playground, game room, lawn sports, exercise room, spa. Guest **Services:** valet laundry, rental car service.



















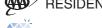












RESIDENCE INN BY MARRIOTT CANCUN BOOK NOW 998/689-2300



AAA Benefit: Members save 5% or more and earn Marriott Bonvoy™ points when booking AAA/CAA rates!

SAVE) Extended Stay Hotel. Address: Bluffs Kuklucan KM 235 77500.

## ROYALTON CHIC CANCUN, AUTOGRAPH COLLECTION BY



**BOOK NOW** 

998/868-5900



AUTOGRAPH AAA Benefit: Members save 5% or more and earn Marriott COLLECTION<sup>®</sup> Bonvoy<sup>™</sup> points when booking AAA/CAA rates!

HOTELS

Resort Hotel. Address: KM 97 Blvd Kuklucan Zona Hotelera 77500. **Location:** Oceanfront. **Facility:** The spacious rooms at this adults only property are beautifully appointed. They feature luxurious bedding, ample seating, unique interactive TVs and outdoor balconies with exceptional views. Meets AAA quest room security requirements. 457 units. 18 stories, interior corridors. Parking: on-site and valet. **Terms:** age restrictions may apply. **Amenities:** safes. **Dining:** 7 restaurants, entertainment. Pool: outdoor. Activities: sauna, hot tub, steamroom, beach on-site, cabanas, fishing, scuba diving, snorkeling, recreation programs, lawn sports, exercise room, spa. Guest Services: valet laundry, rental car service.





















#### SANDOS CANCUN BOOK NOW 998/881-2200



Resort Hotel. Address: KM 14 Retorno del Rey 77500. Location: Oceanfront. Facility: Rooms feature trendy, chic décor with ample seating and silky-soft bedding. Many rooms include striking views of the Caribbean, with its occasionally strong and dramatic surf. Meets AAA guest room security requirements. 214 units, some two bedrooms. 8 stories, interior corridors. Parking: on-site and valet. Amenities: safes. Dining: 5 restaurants, entertainment. Pool: outdoor. Activities: sauna, hot tub, steamroom, beach on-site, cabanas, fishing, scuba diving, snorkeling, tennis, recreation programs, exercise room, spa. Guest Services: valet laundry.



























#### SECRETS PLAYA BLANCA COSTA MUJERES BOOK NOW 998/689-3800





#### AAA Benefit: Members save up to 10% and earn World of Hyatt points when booking AAA/CAA rates!

Hotel. Address: Carr Punta Sam-isla Blanca MZ0 Lote 10. Facility: This property feature all suites with a sofa and a balcony. Enjoy the

amazing ocean view as you relax at the beach or pool. Grab dinner at one of the many restaurants before a show at the theater. 507 units. 1-5 stories, interior/exterior corridors. Parking: valet only. Amenities: safes. Dining: 7 restaurants, nightclub, entertainment. Pool: outdoor, heated outdoor. Activities: sauna, hot tub, steamroom, cabanas, self-propelled boats, fishing, scuba diving, snorkeling, tennis, recreation programs, game room, lawn sports, trails, health club, spa. Guest Services: rental car service.





























#### SECRETS PLAYA MUJERES GOLF & SPA RESORT BOOK NOW 998/283-3600



INSPECTED @ CLEAN



AAA Benefit: Members save up to 10% and earn World of Hyatt points when booking AAA/CAA rates!

Resort Hotel. Address: Prolongation Bonampak S/N Punta SAM CP. **Location:** Oceanfront. **Facility:** This lovely upscale resort is situated at

the remote edge of a nature preserve, providing a sense of peaceful privacy. The suites are spacious with upscale amenities and all have balconies or patios. Meets AAA guest room security requirements. 424 units, some two bedrooms and kitchens. 1-5 stories, exterior corridors. Parking: valet only. Terms: age restrictions may apply. Amenities: safes. Dining: 7 restaurants, nightclub, entertainment. Pool: heated outdoor. Activities: sauna, hot tub, steamroom, beach on-site, cabanas, self-propelled boats, fishing, scuba diving, snorkeling, regulation golf, tennis, recreation programs, bicycles, lawn sports, trails, exercise room, spa. Guest Services: valet laundry, rental car service. (See ad starting on p. 86.)























#### ROMANTIC GETAWAY





Secrets Playa Mujeres Golf & Spa Resort is located on the famous white sandy beaches of the beautiful, private area of Playa Mujeres within a safe gated community. This contemporary, adults-only resort boasts stunning suites, most with ocean views, and is only 35 minutes from the Cancun International Airport. Situated in a exclusive gated community with a 18-hole signature Greg Norman golf course and just 10 minutes from downtown Cancun, Secrets Playa Mujeres is in close proximity to the best attractions, shopping centers, beachfront restaurants and nightlife in the area. In addition, guests at Secrets Playa Mujeres have complete access to Dreams Playa Mujeres next door. Endless luxury awaits at Secrets Playa Mujeres.

Secrets Playa Mujeres Golf & Spa Resort features 424 elegantly appointed non-smoking suites, each with a private, furnished terrace, balcony or swim out access with remarkable ocean, pool or garden views. Amenities include: Full bathroom with hydrotub and rain shower • Secrets Box for private room service delivery • Flat screen cable TV • Electronic safety deposit box (laptop size) • Individually controlled air- conditioning • Night table with lamp • Slippers and bathrobe • Full length mirror • 24-hour room service • Iron and iron table • Steam wand (available upon request) • Nesspresso coffee machine • Hair dryer • Vanity mirror.

#### Preferred Club

Preferred Club Suites additionally include: Access to the private Preferred Club Lounge • Preferred status and amenities • Daily continental breakfast service, afternoon hot and cold hors d'oeuvres and exquisite desserts in the lounge • Complimentary computer access in the lounge • Upgraded mini-bar and bath amenities • Personalized check-in and check-out • Complimentary access to hydrotherapy circuit (one day per stay) • Pillow menu • Á la carte breakfast in Oceana restaurant with spectacular oceanfront views • À la carte breakfast in Maris restaurant at Dreams Playa Mujeres • Access to private Preferred Club area on the beach with Bali beds • Exclusive access to the Preferred Club Lounge next door at Dreams Playa Mujeres • 20% off spa treatments • Access to Lazy River at Dreams Playa Mujeres

#### Secrets Spa

The Secrets Spa by Pevonia® spans more than 16,000 sq. ft. and offers a sublime atmosphere of pure indulgence. Pamper, indulge and rejuvenate with the many different treatments offered for your supreme relaxation. The spa features indigenous treatments and traditional methods to create a refreshing, invigorating and peaceful experience. Indulge in your choice of the most soothing, relaxing and result driven treatments featuring: Specialty treatments • Steam rooms • Sauna • Massages • Facials • Manicures • Pedicures • Beauty salon • Aromatherapy • Hydrotherapy circuit • Treatment specials • Body Wraps & Body Scrubs

#### Gastronomy

Secrets Playa Mujeres offers 9 dining options: 1 buffet restaurant, 6 à la carte restaurants, a grill and a café. No reservations required. All restaurants openings rotate throughout the week. 24-hour dining options allow guests to enjoy late night bites at Coco Café or guests can stay in and order room service. It's all available at any hour day or night Offering 8 bars and lounges, serving international and domestic top-shelf spirits, ranging from swim-up to a nightly music lounge.

#### Weddings

Our dedicated wedding planners specialize in ensuring that every detail is carefully attended to and personalized with meticulous attention. We offer a wide range of spectacular ocean-view venues for ceremonies, cocktails, and receptions, complemented by various packages that you can explore on our website. From romantic sunset ceremonies to vibrant parties under the stars, our goal is to make your special day unforgettable.\*

#### Groups

Our dedicated group event planners are masters at making sure everything you need is perfectly provided — with immaculate care and personalized attention. We offer a wide array of memorable group functions. From creative theme parties and fun-filled team building activities to casually elegant gala dinners and exciting excursions.\*

#### Additional services

Secrets Spa • State-of-the-art meetings facilities • Full-service business center • Adjacent championship golf courses • Wedding, honeymoon and spa packages • Wedding gazebo • Shopping area • Laundry service • Car rental • Beauty salon • Private, romantic dining • Tours and excursions • Currency exchange • Medical Service\* • ATM









# Download maps for travel

Wherever your travels take you, take along maps from the AAA/CAA Map Gallery. Choose from more than 400 U.S., Canada and Mexico maps of metro areas, cruise terminals, national parks and key destinations.



#### SECRETS THE VINE CANCUN BOOK NOW 998/848-9400





AAA Benefit: Members save up to 10% and earn World of Hyatt points when booking AAA/CAA rates!

Contemporary Resort Hotel. Address: Retorno del Rey 38, Zona Hotelera 77500. Location: Oceanfront. Facility: This chic, upscale

high-rise is one of Cancun's latest all-inclusive resorts. Rooms feature excellent bedding and ample closet space. The bathrooms are spacious with excellent upscale shower fixtures. Meets AAA quest room security requirements. 497 units, some two bedrooms. 18 stories, interior corridors. Parking: valet only. Terms: age restrictions may apply. Amenities: safes. Dining: 6 restaurants, entertainment. Pool: heated outdoor. Activities: sauna, hot tub, steamroom, beach on-site, fishing, scuba diving, snorkeling, recreation programs, game room, lawn sports, exercise room, spa. Guest Services: valet laundry.































#### SUN PALACE CANCUN BOOK NOW 998/891-4100



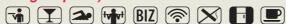
Resort Hotel. Address: Blvd Kukulcan KM 20 77500. Location: Oceanfront. Facility: This all-inclusive property offers spacious rooms with ample storage, soft bedding and upscale bathrooms with jetted tubs. The outdoor balcony area provides breathtaking views of the ocean and beach. Meets AAA quest room security requirements. 247 units, some two bedrooms. 8 stories, interior corridors. Parking: on-site and valet. Terms: age restrictions may apply. Amenities: safes. Dining: 4 restaurants, entertainment. Pool: heated outdoor. Activities: sauna, hot tub, steamroom, beach on-site, recreation programs, lawn sports, health club, spa. Guest Services: valet laundry. (See ad starting on p. 90.)

























TRS CORAL HOTEL BOOK NOW 998/868-5200



Resort Hotel. Address: Vialidad Paseo Mujeres 77400. Location: Oceanfront. Facility: This adults only all-inclusive resort features quite an impressive number of amenities. The spacious rooms offer luxuriously soft bedding, ample seating and 55-inch flat-panel TVs. Meets AAA quest room security requirements. 473 units, some two bedrooms. 4 stories, interior corridors. Parking: on-site and valet. Terms: age restrictions may apply. Amenities: safes. Dining: 6 restaurants, nightclub, entertainment. Pool: heated outdoor. Activities: sauna, hot tub, steamroom, beach on-site, cabanas, self-propelled boats, fishing, scuba diving, snorkeling, tennis, recreation programs, game room, lawn sports, health club, spa. Guest Services: valet laundry, rental car service, area transportation.











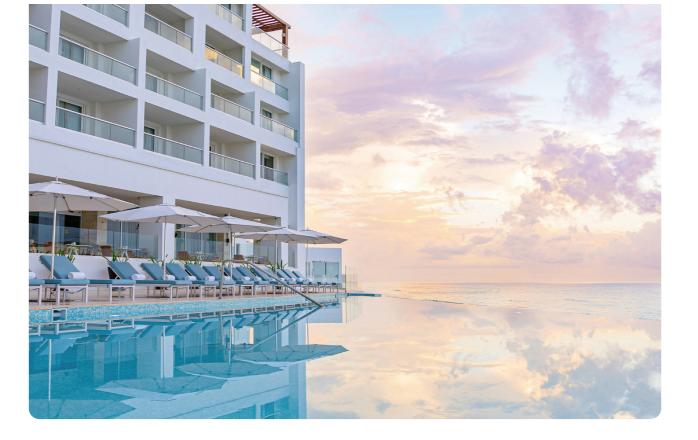












# STILL SHINING BRIGHT



#### Sun Palace: 4-Diamond Excellence In Cancun

**Sun Palace** continues to earn excellent ratings from AAA, an honor that is only bestowed on resorts that offer the best upscale amenities and high-end service. Only minutes from the airport, our **adults-only all-inclusive** resort has become a luxury oasis in Cancun's bustling Hotel Zone.

#### **FALL IN LOVE WITH LUXURY AT SUN PALACE**

#### **Adults Only Excellence**

Discover the 4-Diamond difference at Sun Palace in Cancun, where adults-only luxury means you can enjoy unlimited fine dining & drinks, sun-soaked beaches, three infinity pools, bars (including swim-up bars), and amenities galore...all against the backdrop of the warm, blue waters of the Mexican Caribbean.

Let's explore what your stay will look like .

#### **Luxurious Accommodations**

Sun Palace offers 245 lavish guest accommodations that include plush bedding, double whirlpool tubs, daily-replenished minibars and in-room liquor dispensers stocked with top-shelf brands, a welcome bottle of wine, pillow mist aromas in applicable categories, CHI® bathroom amenities & L'Occitane® soap, high-speed Wi-Fi, a Smart TV with Chromecast, and other state-of-the-art technology.

#### **Gourmet Dining & Top-Shelf Drinks**

The recipe for awe-inclusive dining at Sun Palace requires topnotch, fresh ingredients and native, world-class chefs who know how to season with creativity and inspiration. Then, simply add top-shelf creations, perfected by mixology experts.

Go on a culinary journey around the world: dine on Pan-Asian cuisine at Thai; enjoy fire-grilled Latin-American favorites at **Fuego**, authentic Italian dishes at **Trattoria**, and explore Mexico & the world at **Aurora**. Plus, poolside gourmet snacks, and coffee, ice cream (now including vegan flavors), chocolates & desserts at **Sweet & Coffee**.

Did we mention you can sip unlimited cocktails, wine & more? Sun Palace includes an elegant Lobby Bar, a Wet Bar, and Swim-Up Bar where our expert mixologists concoct classic & original cocktails.

#### **World-class spa: Pamper Your Senses**

If you desire to disconnect, unwind and replenish your body and soul, head to our award-winning spa. Relax and rejuvenate with a variety of signature treatments including hydrating body wraps, deep-tissue massages, luxurious facials, hydrotherapy, plunge pools, herbal steam rooms, and more. You can also choose one-of-a-kind couples' spa experiences, such as In Vino Veritas.

#### **Palace Discoveries**

Take adventure to new levels. Choose from activities to suit any age or interest, from cultural tours to Chichen Itza and luxury yacht tours along the coast to exploring underwater caves or diving along glorious coral reefs.

#### Play & Explore

There's always something to do at Sun Palace. Soak up the sun on the beach, play a round at our Jack Nicklaus Signature golf course (at nearby Moon Palace Cancun), enjoy live music and entertainment, or just float in one of our three stunning infinity pools, with a signature cocktail in hand. Or center your wellness with a vacation workout at our fitness center with a view.

Sun Palace is a 4-Diamond romantic retreat by The Palace Company, offering the ultimate in adults-only vacation perfection.







#### VILLA DEL PALMAR CANCUN LUXURY BEACH RESORT & SPA BOOK NOW 998/193-2600



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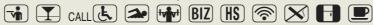
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 $[\mathbf{fyi}]$  Hotel. Did not meet all AAA requirements for locking devices in some quest rooms at time of last evaluation on 11/06/2023. Address: Blvd Kukulcan KM 95 Lote 6, Zona Hotelera 77500. Facilities, services, and décor characterize an upscale property. (See ad starting on p. 94, p. 97.)

#### WHERE TO EAT



THE CLUB GRILL 998/881-0808



International Fine Dining. Address: Retorno del Rey No 36, Zona Hotelera 77500.



**FANTINO** 998/881-0808



Mediterranean Fine Dining. Expert Advice: The talented chefs of this elegant dining venue have created a specialty menu that features classic dishes in beautiful presentations. A chef's tasting menu, with or without wine, is offered nightly for those guests who like to sample many courses. The service is refined and attentive. Features: full bar. Reservations: suggested. Semiformal attire. Address: Retorno del Rey No 36, Zona Hotelera 77500. Parking: valet only.



GUSTINO ITALIAN GRILL 998/848-9600



Regional Italian Fine Dining. Address: Blvd Kukulcan KM 145 77500.



INDOCHINE 998/891-5700



Asian Fusion Fine Dining. Address: Blvd Kukulcan KM 21, 260 Lt 1-01 Mz Zona Hotelera 77500.



Please refer to pages 10-11 for Inspected Clean details.





Live dancers, actors, and music illustrate various moments throughout history while a narrator depicts the journey.



#### LA DOLCE VITA DOWNTOWN 998/884-3393



Italian Casual Dining. Expert Advice: Located between the mainland and the Hotel Zone, this is one of Cancún's oldest Italian restaurants. The menu lists an array of options, from starter courses like spinach salad and carpaccio to entrées that include osso buco, delicately prepared seafood dishes, risotto, lasagna and ravioli. A garden-like atmosphere and professional servers enhance the overall dining experience. Flavorful breakfast options are served until noon. Features: full bar. Reservations: suggested. Address: Ave Coba 87, SM 3 77500.



#### LA PUNTA GRILL & LOUNGE 998/891-5700



Steak Seafood Fine Dining. Address: Blvd Kukulcan KM 2126, Punta Nizuc 77500.



LE BASILIC 998/881-3200



French Fine Dining. Address: Blvd Kukulcan KM 95 Lote 6, Zona Hotelera 77500. (See ad starting on p. 94.)



#### MARIA DOLORES BY EDGAR NUNEZ 998/500-4848



Mexican Fine Dining. Expert Advice: The restaurant offers a fine dining experience in an upscale atmosphere with a refined level of service. Popular items include the baby carrots, Caesar salad and suckling pig. If adventurous, choose the 8 course tasting menu with or without wine pairings. Features: full bar. Reservations: required. Semiformal attire. Address: Prolongacion Bonampak S/N Mz 1 Lote RTH4 SM3 77400. Parking: valet only.



#### RAMONA 998/891-5700



Northern Mexican Fine Dining. Address: Blvd Kukulcan KM 21, 260 Lote 1-01 Mz Zona Hotelera 77500.



#### RESTAURANT MEMORIES 998/881-2300



Regional Spanish Fine Dining. Expert Advice: The restaurant features a wonderfully designed menu, offering selections such as fresh fish and seafood, Wagyu steak tartar, pork belly, foie gras and house created pasta. Courses are presented in imaginative ways combined with excellent flavor and textures. Features: full bar. Reservations: required. Address: Boulevard Costa Mujeres Lote 6 77400. Parking: valet only.



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## The Caribbean Coast

Note: Destinations in this region listed under their own names are Akumal, Cozumel, Isla Holbox, Isla Mujeres, Majahual, Playa del Carmen, Puerto Morelos and Tulum.

Cancún has one heck of a winning vacation formula. Begin with a string of glittering beachfront hotels where every amenity is provided. Add an assortment of local restaurants offering a variety of cuisines, many with the added bonus of lovely water views. Stir in things for couples to do, which range from sedate to slammin' and nightspots that extend the party into the wee hours. Provide numerous opportunities for shopping (humble souvenir stalls, ritzy malls and everything in between) and recreation (boating, fishing and snorkeling, to name just three). And it all takes place against a backdrop of sun, blue skies and turquoise water.

But Cancún isn't the only place to go in the destination; the stretch of Caribbean coast all the way south to the Belize border is speckled with beaches every bit as beautiful. A number of adventurous things to do lean toward the thrilling, like riding a zipline above a jungle canopy or exploring the otherworldly depths of a freshwater sinkhole. And in an era where going green has become a burgeoning movement, protection of the natural environment is a key component of Mexican Caribbean tourism, along with the preservation and celebration of native Yucatecan culture.

#### It's All in the Name

Two names define the Caribbean coast. The area known and promoted as the Riviera Maya covers the coastal strip from the town of Puerto Morelos south to the town of Tulum. The inland town of Felipe Carrillo Puerto, about 40 kilometers (25 miles) south of Tulum, also is considered part of the Riviera Maya. From a traveler's



## Destination Caribbean Coast

This map shows cities in the Caribbean Coast vicinity where you will find attractions, hotels and restaurants. Cities are listed alphabetically in this book on the following pages.



Akumal	105
Cozumel	112
Isla Holbox	119
Isla Mujeres	122
Kantenah	126
Playa del Carmen	126
Puerto Aventuras	158
Puerto Morelos	159
Tulum	164

perspective, however, what constitutes the Riviera Maya is a somewhat fluid definition, as other destinations—for example, the major archeological ruins at Cobá (see separate listing under Yucatán Peninsula)—are a fairly short distance from the coast and thus easily reached.

Between Tulum and the tiny lobster fishing village of Punta Allen is a 30-mile stretch of largely unspoiled coastline lying within the Si'an Kaan Biosphere Reserve, a protected area covering more than a million acres that is a haven for diverse plant and animal species. While long known for sports fishing, birding and adventurous things to do, this stretch also is known for small-scale, ecologically oriented tourism. It's the wilder side of the Caribbean coast—a swath of stunning empty beaches, mangrove forests and dense jungle scrub.

Farther south it gets wilder still. The length of coastline from Punta Herrero—another miniscule fishing village perched on a little sand spit at the head of Espíritu Santo Bay—south to the remote outpost of Xcalak, near the Mexico-Belize border, is referred to as the Costa Maya. The Costa Maya focuses on small-scale adventure travel. but the pier at the small port of Majahual has brought cruise vacations to the forefront.

Geographically speaking, this region embraces three islands as well: Cozumel, Isla Holbox and Isla Mujeres. All are less than 15 miles from the mainland, and the warm, clear Caribbean waters teem with myriad species of tropical and game fish.

Cancún itself isn't officially part of the Riviera Maya, but the great majority of Mexican Caribbean visitors arrive via



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Cancún International Airport from international flights. For many travelers it offers last-minute travel and makes a convenient base from which to embark on day trips down the coast via such transportation options as rental cars and jeeps, public buses or private cabs. But Cancún shares a geographical proximity and the physical attributes that make it a kindred spirit of the Riviera Maya, the Costa Maya and the offshore islands.

#### Thrill Seeking

Among this coastal destination's most notable natural features and things to see are the sinkholes called cenotes (say-NO-tays). The underlying limestone's porous quality leads to the formation of caverns and caves where fresh water collects. The water in cenotes is known for both its clarity and for colors ranging from deep blue to turquoise to emerald green. Furthermore, portions of limestone that weaken and collapse over time can form holes in a cavern ceiling, allowing shafts of light to penetrate otherwise dark surroundings and illuminate the numerous stalactite and stalagmite formations. These features lend a surreal aspect to the appearance of many underground cenotes.

Cenotes at land level, in contrast, look like any lake or pond. These sinkholes are often created when the ceiling of an underlying cave collapses. Specialized plants take root in the pile of rubble left behind by a collapse, their roots eventually splitting the rock to tap the cave water below. Then there are partially enclosed cenotes, which have some sections that are exposed to full sunlight and others where little natural light penetrates.

Land-level cenotes are common in the interior peninsula and function as swimming holes and things to see, while those along the coast frequently serve as entry points to extensive subterranean cave systems. Adventure travel, such as underwater cave exploration along the Quintana Roo coast, dates only to the early 1980s, but since then a number of cave systems have been discovered. Cave diving is a sport best left to experts, but amateurs can enjoy snorkeling in the clear, cool waters of a cenote while exploring bizarrely beautiful rock formations. Cenote snorkeling and diving has quickly become one of this region's most adventurous things to do.

Ziplining is popular as well. A steel cable mounted on an incline, a zipline propels users wearing a harness that is attached to a freely moving pulley; it provides a heartthumping thrill of a ride as well as an elevated bird's-eye view of the scenery en route. Zipline outfitters along the Quintana Roo coast take advantage of scenic environments that range from jungle canopies to the open Caribbean.

Reputable operators provide all necessary safety equipment and offer a thorough demonstration, including ziplining do's and don'ts, before anyone leaves the ground. You, on the other hand, should be in moderate to good physical condition, have some familiarity with adventure sport abilities and not be afraid of heights. Zipline excursions often include other fun things to do like biking along unpaved jungle trails and swimming in a cenote.

Cancún-based Selvática organizes various zipline, offroad and ATV travel packages, including round-trip transportation from Cancún and Riviera Maya hotels. For additional details check the website or phone (855) 203-9863 (from the United States) or (855) 882-6470 (from Canada).

You can still do the tried-and-true tourist thing here—a sunset lagoon cruise, perhaps, or a snorkeling trip. But many travel tours along the Caribbean coast cater specifically to the adventure travel crowd. Playa del Carmenbased Alltournative specializes in vacation packages, which may include rappelling into a cenote or piloting a sea kayak to an offshore coral reef. Their guided half-day and all-day trips also introduce you to local culture; for example, participating in an authentic Mayan blessing ceremony. For more information check the website or phone (877) 437-4990 (from the United States) or (877) 432-1569 (from Canada).

#### **Touring the Riviera Maya**

Organized bus travel tours departing from Cancún are plentiful, and this is certainly a convenient and hassle-free way to experience such established Caribbean coast tourist destinations as Xcaret, Xel-Ha and the Tulum Ruins. But driving yourself offers greater flexibility and the opportunity to check out secluded spots a travel agency may not include. Mex. 307, the main highway, hugs the coast from Cancún as far south as Tulum before turning inland and continuing all the way to the city of Chetumal, near the border with Belize.

All-inclusive beachfront resorts line the Riviera Maya. These accommodations add up to far more than simply a night's lodging—in addition to food places, they offer everything from organized things to do with kids, to Spanish lessons to yoga classes on the beach. Ocean trampolines, catamaran excursions, theme parties under a starry night sky and many adventurous things to do are part and parcel of the all-inclusive experience, making them very popular with families and group travel enthusiasts.

If you've never driven Mex. 307, this four-lane divided highway is in good condition from Cancún south to Playa del Carmen. Speed bumps are present when approaching traffic lights at some intersections (road signs denote their presence). Speed limits vary from 70 kilometers per hour (about 45 mph) to 100 kilometers per hour (about 65 mph), but along most stretches the limit is 80 kilometers per hour (about 50 mph). It drops to 40 kilometers per hour (about 25 mph) when approaching Puerto Morelos, Playa del Carmen and Tulum.

International green road signs with picture symbols denote towns, points of interest, gas stations, resort hotels, etc. Practically every point of interest is a kilometer or two east or west of Mex. 307 via paved, dirt or rutted roads; they're designated by crude signs as well as prominent billboards. Mileage signs are posted in kilometers, and kilometer markers are installed along the right-hand side of the highway. Drive defensively—much of the route runs straight as a ruler, and many motorists tend to speed—and avoid driving after dark since lighting along most stretches is inadequate.

From Cancún it takes about 90 minutes (without stops) to reach the southern end of the Riviera Maya at Tulum. From Ciudad Cancún, take Avenida Tulum (which becomes Mex. 307) south. From the Hotel Zone, take Boulevard Kukulcán south toward the airport. After rounding Nizuc Point (Punta Nizuc), the southern tip of the island, Kukulcán curves west toward Mex. 307. Continue to the highway interchange and follow the signs for Playa del Carmen and Tulum.

The terrain is flat, and the thick jungle that once blanketed this coastal region is largely gone. The highway offers no glimpses of the Caribbean or Caribbean travel highlights; the coastline is a mile or two to the east. Occasional roadside establishments along Mex. 307 offer hammocks, blankets and crafts for sale, and signs at turnoffs announce the latest upscale resort development that has either just opened or is under construction.

The main turn-off for Puerto Morelos (an intersection with a traffic signal) is about 36 kilometers (22 miles) south of Cancún's Hotel Zone. This laid-back village has beaches backed by coconut palms, a municipal dock and the turquoise hues of the Caribbean. Adventure travel options, including snorkeling and diving, are excellent due to the coral reef that is less than 2,000 feet offshore. For a perfectly relaxed afternoon, stroll along the sandy beach in the center of town and then grab a bite to eat at one of the casual local restaurants on the main square (zócalo).

The turn-off for Punta Beté, about 58 kilometers (36 miles) south of Cancún, is signed "Punta Beté/Xcalacoco." The bumpy dirt road leads to a rocky beach and inexpensive cabana-type hotels.

#### Playing in Playa

Either the first or second turn-offs (Avenida Constituyentes and Avenida Juárez, respectively) will take you to downtown Playa del Carmen, about 68 kilometers (42 miles) south of Cancún. Avenida Juárez goes straight to the main plaza. If you miss the inside left-turn lanes (easy to do) you can proceed south to the turnaround and then double back. An elevated overpass built directly over Mex. 307, some 6 kilometers (4 miles) in length, allows drivers en route to points south to bypass the destination completely; there are entrance and exit ramps at key cross

The Riviera Maya's largest city and biggest travel destination is awash in glitzy, expensive resort properties and also has a hopping nightlife scene. But despite explosive growth Playa remains a small town at heart. The vibe along pedestrian-only 5th Avenue (Quinta Avenida), just a block off the beach, is leisurely. You can lunch alfresco at a local restaurant, browse block after block of shops or just relax on a bench at small, palm-shaded Parque Fundadores, the main plaza, and gaze out at the Caribbean.

South of Playa del Carmen Mex. 307 continues as a four-lane divided highway before eventually alternating between two- and three-lane stretches (with the middle lane used as a passing lane by both southbound and northbound vehicles). Be careful when passing, as drivers in the oncoming lane may cross over the center line unexpectedly. Also use caution when making left turns; turn lanes are marked by reflectors on the road.

The turn-off for Xcaret is about 72 kilometers (45 miles) south of Cancún. This big aquatic theme park puts emphasis on the preservation of Mayan heritage and the Yucatán Peninsula's natural resources. One of the things to see is an underground river that flows through a series of caves to the beach; swimmers float along with the current.

Ten kilometers (6 miles) beyond Xcaret, just north of Puerto Aventuras, is the signed turn-off for Paamul (paul-MOOL), a sheltered cove with a rocky beach that is a popular thing for couples to do. You can swim here when seas are calm, and snorkeling is good in the vicinity of an offshore coral reef. The beach is sandier and less rocky at the south end.

The turn-off for Puerto Aventuras is about 85 kilometers (53 miles) south of Cancún. This long-established resort community also is a sport fishing and adventure travel center, which offers large marina surrounded by shops and casual open-air food places. Much of the beachfront is occupied by resort properties and hotels; the main beach area is along Fatima Bay between the Chac Hal condominium development and the Grand Peninsula residential complex.

A few kilometers south of Puerto Aventuras are several turn-offs for Xpu-Ha (take the one signed "La Playa" for public access to the beach). The stretch of beach is lovely and clean (it's raked to remove seaweed), and the water is picture-postcard turquoise. Unlike some Riviera Maya beaches, the bottom is generally sandy and free of rocks, which means swimmers don't need to don footwear. The Palace chain of all-inclusive resorts has properties here,

although the beach—like all beaches in Mexico—is open to the public; beach chairs, *palapas* and other amenities are reserved for hotel guests. Xpu-Ha is a locals' hangout where casual beachside restaurants offer up fish tacos and ice-cold beer.

South of Xpu-Ha and about 105 kilometers (65 miles) south of Cancún is the turn-off for Akumal. On the west side of the highway is the tiny *pueblo* (community) of Akumal, which consists of one main thoroughfare, some side streets and a couple of small businesses. Much larger, tourist-oriented Akumal, which features fun things to do, is east of the highway.

A few kilometers south of Akumal is the signed turn-off for Xcacel, a lovely white-sand beach on a crescent-shaped bay with calm, clear water. The area is an important nesting site for Atlantic green and loggerhead turtles, both on the endangered species list, and ongoing efforts are being made to ensure their preservation. At the south end of the beach is a path that leads through a stand of mangroves to a small freshwater cenote. Xcacel is a protected nature preserve, and boating, sport fishing and overnight camping are prohibited.

About 122 kilometers (76 miles) south of Cancún is the well-marked turn-off to Xel-Ha (shell-HAH), an ecologically oriented park centered around a large lagoon. It's one of the best things to do with kids, and the environment caters to novice snorkelers. Group travel or daylong vacation packages that include transportation are popular and easily arranged; check with hotels or your local AAA Travel Agency.

#### An Outpost by the Sea

One look at the ruins of Tulum, about 131 kilometers (81 miles) south of Cancún (the turn-off is prominently signed), and it's understandable why the Maya chose this destination: This is the only section of the low-lying Caribbean coast where limestone deposits built up to form coastal cliffs. Tulum's clifftop setting overlooking turquoise water is dramatic. Explore the various things to see—notably the ruins—then hike to the beach below and enjoy a swim.

Many Tulum residents work at nearby resort properties and hotels. Mex. 307 is the main drag, lined with souvenir shops, open-air food places, fruit markets and businesses from muffler repair shops to internet cafés. Once out of town, Mex. 307 turns southwest into the scrubby flatlands of interior Quintana Roo on the way to Felipe Carrillo Puerto and Bacalar.

If you want to explore Tulum's beaches and hotels (and you should, since it's a pretty drive), take the paved road east that branches off Mex. 307 at the northern end of

town (signed "Playas/Punta Allen"). After about 5 kilometers (3 miles) it reaches a fork; turn right (south) for the hotel zone.

The narrow, winding, palm-shaded drive extends south for several miles, lined with cabanas, thatched *palapa* huts and small hotels. One of the first properties is La Posada del Sol, a tropical "eco-boutique" that spreads along both sides of the beach road. In the vicinity are several local restaurants and a couple of mini-markets. There's also an onsite shop that sells jewelry and handicrafts.

Brake for the occasional *tope* (speed bump). The lodgings are all steps away from the water, although the beach is mostly hidden from view. Nearby restaurants as well as the occasional shopping boutique and nightspot are also along the beach road.

Once past the Tulum hotel zone the coast road continues south down the length of the Boca Paila Peninsula. This narrow isthmus of land is within the 1.3 million-acre Sian Ka'an Biosphere Reserve and is the only portion of the reserve open to visitors. The vast tract of coastal wilderness is a haven for wildlife, including some endangered species. If you want to access the reserve and/or travel down to Punta Allen, you must stop and pay the registration fee of around \$4 (U.S.) per person at the guardhouse designating the official point of entry.

#### The End of the Line

At the guardhouse, set your car's trip meter to zero. Ten kilometers (6.2 miles) down the road is a small visitor center with a handful of displays focusing on Sian Ka'an's flora, fauna and history. Information panels are in Spanish and English. A short trail leads inland to a wooden dock fronting an expansive lagoon. Here you can arrange things to do; think kayak rentals (about \$20 U.S. per hour) and 90-minute boat tours of the lagoon (about \$40 U.S. per person). Reservations are not necessary.

Beyond the visitor center the setting is dense scrub jungle, with empty, palm-studded beaches and mangrove-lined estuaries along the Caribbean coast and a network of lagoons and waterways between the peninsula and the mainland. There are points where your peripheral vision will encompass sea, land and lagoon. Rustic eco lodges cater to dedicated birders (species common to this region include frigate birds, brown pelicans, woodpeckers, parrots and the Yucatán jay) and adventure travel enthusiasts who don't mind roughing it for the superb fishing.

Some 17 kilometers (10.6 miles) past the guardhouse there is easy beach access and good swimming at a gorgeous semi-sheltered cove. Park anywhere along the side of the road. Xamach Dos (24 kilometers south of the guardhouse) is a sleepy beachfront hotel with a few rental cabanas and a small *palapa* restaurant. There are picnic

tables and beach chairs at the water's edge. If you've always fantasized about having a Caribbean beach all to yourself, continue toward Punta Allen and pull off at any of the small, unmarked turn-outs along the beach side of the road. Cancún this is not.

This truly off-the-beaten-path destination culminates at the hamlet of Punta Allen—a couple of local restaurants, a handful of convenience stores and a few fishing and eco travel tour guide services—set smack dab in an idyllic setting of coconut palms, thatched palapas and stunning Caribbean views. The road comes to an end at a lighthouse with a mirador (viewing platform) that looks out over the vast saltwater flats of Ascension Bay (Bahía de la Ascensión). This is one of the best fly-fishing spots in the world for anglers seeking tarpon, bonefish and the elusive permit, a game fish with a deeply forked tail related to the pompano.

Trekkers take note: It is approximately 45 kilometers (28) miles) from the Sian Ka'an guardhouse to Punta Allen. Much of the route—which is gradually being paved and improved—is a narrow one-lane trail of packed dirt and sand over limestone. It winds through dense scrub jungle, passing deserted beaches, mangrove flats and even an occasional Mayan ruin. Iguanas scurry across the road. Ruts and potholes are more evident after crossing the Boca Paila bridge, about 24 kilometers (15 miles) south of the guardhouse.

You can travel in a car, but a jeep or four-wheel-drive vehicle is recommended. Be sure you have a full tank of gas and bring drinking water, food and insect repellent. Plan on at least 2 hours (not including stops) to reach Punta Allen from Tulum, although once you're familiar with the road it's safe to shave a good 20 minutes off your estimated return drive time. If you're not spending the night in Punta Allen allow enough time to get back to Mex. 307 before dusk.

With adventurous things to do, this trip isn't for the faint of heart, but that's the beauty of Caribbean travel. You can hole up in sheltered luxury and pamper yourself, or leave your comfort zone behind for the shot of adrenaline that real adventure provides.

#### **AKUMAL, QUINTANA ROO**

A diving and snorkeling center, Akumal ("place of the turtles" in the Mayan language) is off Mex. 307, about 100 kilometers (62 miles) south of Cancún and about 26 kilometers (16 miles) north of Tulum. Although centered around several resort complexes, you don't need to be a quest at any of them in order to enjoy the long, curving beaches or swim in the warm Caribbean surf. Akumal is laid-back and friendly, a great place to drop your anchor and get into the relaxed rhythms of the Riviera Maya coast.

If driving southbound on Mex. 307, a concrete center median at the Akumal turn-off prevents making a left turn onto the access road. Continue a hundred yards or so to the signed turnaround (retorno), where you can make a U-turn, head back north and turn right onto the access road (signed "Entrada a Akumal" and "Akumal Playa").

Less than half a mile down the road you'll drive under a white arch. Stay to the left to get to the Akumal beach parking lot (there are spaces on either side of the road); an attendant will usually wave you in and collect a small parking fee. Past the parking lot, the beach road continues north to Half Moon Bay and Yal-ku Lagoon (see attraction listing).

Resort facilities spread out along the shore of Akumal Bay, the largest of three bodies of water along this stretch of coast. The white-sand beach is lovely, and it's an easy swim to an offshore reef. The beachfront bar at the Lol-Ha Restaurant is popular with Akumal regulars and offers great bay views.

To the north, Half Moon Bay is lined with a fine-sand beach backed by villas and condos. There's good snorkeling here as well. Kayaks and other water sports equipment can be rented at both bays.

Akumal Dive Adventures, on Half Moon Bay at the Vista del Mar Hotel and Condos, is a PADI-certified dive center that offers scuba and snorkeling trips emphasizing a lowimpact approach to the fragile offshore reef environment. Fishing excursions for mahi mahi, marlin, sailfish and wahoo also can be arranged. Phone (984) 875-9157, or (888) 425-8625 (from the United States).

# Make the Connection



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The Akumal Dive Shop, on Akumal Bay at Plaza Ukana, organizes snorkeling tours that provide an opportunity to view sea turtles in shallow water. You can also snorkel in a jungle cenote or go for a sail aboard a 36-foot catamaran, which includes a stop at a secluded beach for swimming, beach combing and lunch. For additional information and to make reservations phone (984) 875-9032.

**AKTUN CHEN NATURAL PARK** is about 4 km (2.5 mi.) s. of Akumal (watch for the signed turn-off on the right side of Mex. 307 going southbound), then another 4 km (2.5 mi.) down a narrow dirt road to the entrance. This nature park offers a guided half-mile walking tour through a dry cave festooned with stalactites, stalagmites and other natural limestone formations, all enhanced by indirect artificial lighting as well as natural light coming through openings in the cave ceiling.

The tour ends at a freshwater underground cenote with green-hued water that is mostly shallow but reaches a depth of 10 feet in parts. The water is not only remarkably clear but illuminated, creating ideal snorkeling conditions. There is an extra fee to snorkel in the cenote.

For daredevils there's the "Canopy" zipline tour that also features two suspended bridges. Animal exhibits include deer, spider monkeys, toucans, parrots and snakes; wild turkeys and iguanas freely roam the park grounds.

On-site parking is available; for visitors arriving by taxi or colectivo a free shuttle service travels to and from the highway entrance and the park reception area. Restrooms are available. Activity equipment and lockers are provided. Wear comfortable clothing and footwear and bring a bathing suit, towels, biodegradable sunscreen and mosquito repellent. Time: Allow 3 hours minimum. Phone: (984) 806-4962, or 01 (800) 099-0758 (toll-free long distance within Mexico).

YAL-KU LAGOON is about 2 km (1 mi.) n. of town past Half-Moon Bay; take the marked Akumal exit off Mex. 307, stay to the left past the center of town and continue to the end of the beach road. Access to the lagoon is via a short, winding walking path. A brackish mix of fresh and salt water, Yal-ku offers the opportunity to snorkel in a sheltered environment (currents are stronger near the open sea).

Sets of stairs going into the water provide entry to the lagoon's sandy bottom. The water is calm and ranges in depth from 6 to around 15 feet, but due to poor flow clarity can be on the murky side. You will, however, see rock formations, underwater caves, the usual small reef fish, stingrays and turtles. It's a good choice for beginning snorkelers and families with kids. There also are sculptures and gardens on the grounds.

On-site parking is available. Showers and changing rooms are provided. Feeding the fish is not permitted. Time: Allow 2 hours minimum. Phone: (984) 875-9065. 



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Resort Hotel. Address: Tulkal Chemuyil, Carr Cancun. Facility: This beachside resort is a haven of peace, opulence and style. Multiple fine dining experiences are available to tempt your senses and the full spa will provide a delightful escape. 349 units. 3 stories, exterior corridors. Parking: on-site and valet. Amenities: safes. Dining: 3 restaurants. Pool: heated outdoor. Activities: hot tub, self-propelled boats, scuba diving, snorkeling, recreation programs, bicycles, playground, game room, trails, health club, spa. Guest Services: valet laundry.





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#### GRAND PALLADIUM KANTENAH RESORT & SPA BOOK NOW 984/877-2100



Resort Hotel, Address: Carretera Chetumal Puerto Juárez KM 256-100 77710. Location: Oceanfront. Facility: This all-inclusive, family-friendly resort has a unique, open lobby with integrated water channels - it's quite the photogenic spot. Rooms are spacious with ample seating and 49-inch flat-panel TVs. Meets AAA guest room security requirements. 423 units. 3 stories (no elevator), exterior corridors. Amenities: safes. Dining: 3 restaurants, entertainment. Pool: outdoor, heated outdoor. Activities: sauna, hot tub, steamroom, beach on-site, cabanas, self-propelled boats, scuba diving, snorkeling, tennis, recreation programs, kids club, playground, game room, lawn sports, trails, health club, spa. Guest **Services:** valet laundry, rental car service.























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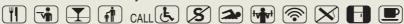
Hotel. Address: Carr Fed Cancun-Tulum KM 2563 77710. Location: Oceanfront. Facility: The property features spacious rooms with ample seating, upscale appointments and large bathrooms with jetted tubs. All rooms also have an outdoor balcony sitting area with exceptional views. Meets AAA quest room security requirements. 946 units. 3 stories, interior/exterior corridors. Parking: on-site and valet. Amenities: safes. Dining: 3 restaurants, nightclub, entertainment. Pool: outdoor. Activities: sauna, hot tub, steamroom, beach on-site, self-propelled boats, scuba diving, snorkeling, tennis, recreation programs, kids club, bicycles, playground, exercise room, spa. Guest Services: valet laundry.

























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Guest rooms offer a tranquil and relaxing vibe that will leave you feeling refreshed. 735 units. 3 stories, exterior corridors. Parking: on-site and valet. Amenities: safes. Dining: 2 restaurants, entertainment. Pool: heated outdoor. Activities: sauna, hot tub, steamroom, snorkeling, recreation programs, kids club, bicycles, playground, game room, trails, health club, spa. Guest Services: valet laundry, rental car service.



























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Resort Hotel. Address: 307 Carretera Federal 307 77790. Location: Oceanfront. Facility: Located in Akumal, which is Mayan for "place of the turtle," this adults-only, all-inclusive resort is ideal for a complete relaxation experience

or to take part in a host of recreational activities. Meets AAA guest room security requirements. 434 units. 3-5 stories, interior/exterior corridors. Parking: on-site and valet. Terms: age restrictions may apply. Amenities: safes. Dining: 7 restaurants, nightclub, entertainment. Pool: heated outdoor. Activities: sauna, hot tub, steamroom, beach on-site, cabanas, self-propelled boats, scuba diving, snorkeling, recreation programs, exercise room, spa. Guest Services: valet laundry, rental car service.



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Resort Hotel, Address: Carr Federal 307 Chetumal-Puerto Juárez 77710. Location: Oceanfront. Facility: This unique property features quest rooms with spacious balconies offering an oversize seating area and large oval-shaped hot tubs. The Estancia Suites provide space upgrades and extra amenities. Meets AAA guest room security requirements. 448 units. 5 stories, interior/exterior corridors. Parking: on-site and valet. Terms: age restrictions may apply. Amenities: safes. Dining: 5 restaurants, nightclub, entertainment. Pool: heated outdoor. Activities: sauna, hot tub, steamroom, beach on-site, cabanas, self-propelled boats, fishing, scuba diving, snorkeling, recreation programs, health club, spa. Guest Services: valet laundry. (See ad starting on p. 110.)































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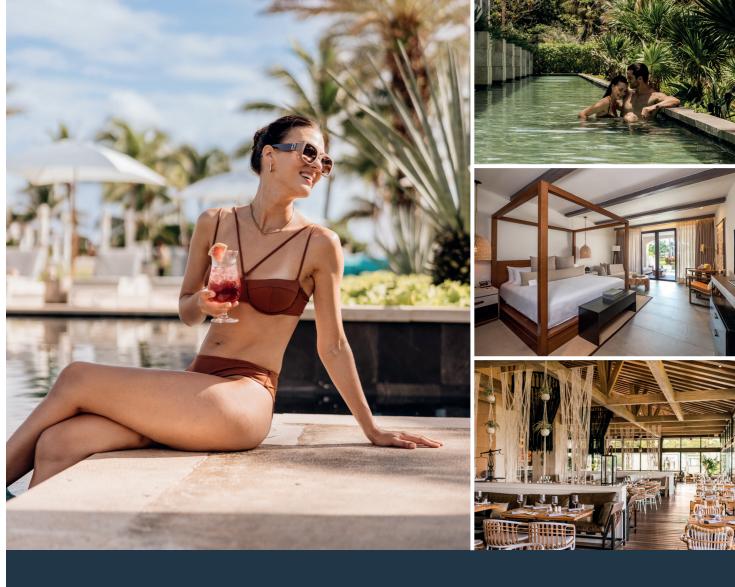
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# **COZUMEL, QUINTANA ROO**

Cozumel International Airport is about 3 kilometers (2 miles) north of San Miguel de Cozumel. Nonstop flights to Cozumel are offered by many airlines in the United States, including American, Delta, Frontier and United. International flights are available on Aeroméxico and Air Canada. If you're traveling during peak busy season (mid-December through mid-April), you'll want to check for discounts on hotels and flights. AAA travel advisors can assist with finding current deals, tours and transportation.

Getting from the airport to your hotel can be arranged with private taxi vans or shared passenger vans (*colectivos*). Shared vans are cheaper but will wait to depart until the vehicle is full; purchase tickets from the driver or at the airport exit. For the return trip to the airport, you can take a cheap city taxi from your hotel.

Many visitors to Cozumel arrive by cruise ship— on Carnival, Holland America, Norwegian, Princess or Royal Caribbean. The cruise ships dock at Cozumel or Playa del Carmen, a 45-minute ferry ride from Cozumel. If you're interested in Cozumel cruises, AAA travel advisors can help arrange all the details and find savings for AAA/CAA members.

Three ferry companies make the 45-minute trip between Cozumel and Playa del Carmen: Barcos Caribe, Ultramar and Winjet. The passenger ferry pier is across from San Miguel de Cozumel's main plaza, and air-conditioned boats depart every hour on the hour (and sometimes on the half-hour) throughout the day.

Ultramar and Mexico Waterjets charge roughly the same one-way fare: 250 pesos for adults and 200 pesos for ages 6-11. Barcos Caribe one-way fare is 135 pesos or 70 pesos for children. If you're just taking a day trip to Playa del Carmen, it's recommended to buy a one-way fare and leave your return time open in case you decide to stay longer or come back early. If you're prone to seasickness, take proper precautions on windy days.

# **Island Layout**

Most of the hotels, business, shops and restaurants in San Miguel de Cozumel line Avenida Rafael Melgar, the main street, which runs north to south along the waterfront. The malecón cement walkway is between Avenida Rafael Melgar and the beach. Avenidas run north-south, while calles run east-west, forming an easy-to-negotiate grid pattern. One paved road, the Carretera Transversal, crosses the island from west to east. At the eastern shore it heads south, rounds the southern tip of the island and becomes the Carretera Costera Sur. Continuing north, it offers access to Cozumel's best beaches before returning to San Miguel de Cozumel.

Mopeds and jeeps are popular ways to get around the island, but downtown streets can be hard to navigate with crowds of people on foot, bicycles and scooters. If you do choose to get around by moped or scooter, there are several places to rent them in San Miguel de Cozumel. Rates average \$25 to \$30 (U.S.) per day, and helmets are required. Jeep rentals are a great way to explore off-the-beaten path areas along the island's rugged eastern coastline. Rates are around \$70 per day for a jeep, and insurance is not included.

If you're staying in Cozumel for more than a day, it might be worth it to rent a car in town or at the airport, since the beaches and other attractions in Cozumel are spread out. Hertz has a rental car counter inside the airport and offers discounts for AAA/CAA members.

A few tips for driving in Cozumel: Curbs painted yellow are for bicycle, motorcycle and moped parking only; curbs painted red are no parking zones. No parking signs feature a black capital "E" with a red line through it. If you're ever stopped by the police for a serious moving violation, your vehicle may be impounded and you'll be asked to accompany the police officer to the station to pay the fine. For minor infractions, the fines can often be paid on the spot, in cash. (In Mexico, a bribe is a common way of taking care of such situations.)

You can hail a taxi on the street in San Miguel de Cozumel or find taxis waiting outside major hotels, the passenger ferry pier or at the cruise ship piers. Most local hotels will call a taxi for their guests. Taxi drivers are generally friendly and courteous, and fares are reasonable. You'll pay a set fare per taxi, and taxis are not metered. Drivers do not carry a lot of change, so be sure to have smaller bills and coins with you. Tips are expected and appreciated.

Fares within town average about 40 pesos. They increase, depending on distance, from downtown San Miguel de Cozumel to places like the airport, the San Gervasio ruins and the northern and southern hotel zones. If you're taking a taxi all the way to Chankanaab Adventure Beach Park, Playa Palancar, Playa San Francisco or other attractions at the southern end of the island, expect to pay fares of about 150 pesos and up.

# **Practicalities**

Cozumel is warm year-round, with the most humidity during the rainy season (June through October). Afternoon showers during these months are generally brief and won't affect your day too much. The rest of the year is dry, warm and sunny, with an occasional cool evening December through February. The possibility of a hurricane or tropical storm is most likely in September or October.

U.S. dollars are almost universally accepted in Cozumel, so even if you're staying for a week, there's really no need to exchange U.S. currency for pesos. A standard 10 pesos-to-\$1 U.S. dollar exchange is common among many smaller businesses and taxi drivers (which could be unfavorable depending on what the official rate is). Some will even make change with a mix of dollars and pesos. Many tourist-oriented shops and local restaurants accept credit cards.

The Red Cross (Cruz Roja) clinic is near the intersection of Avenida 65 Sur and Calle 19 Sur; phone (987) 872-1058. The Cozumel Medical Center (Centro Médico de Cozumel), at Calle 1 Sur and Avenida 50 Sur (a block south of Avenida Benito Juárez, the trans-island road) has a 24-hour clinic and access to air ambulance service; phone (987) 872-9400.

# Things to Do on the Island

When in Cozumel, dive. From the international cruise ship pier south to the island's southern tip are miles of offshore coral reefs that offer some of the most spectacular dive settings in the world. All of the reefs are part of a national marine park that includes the beaches and waters between Paradise Reef and Chiqueros Point. The entire area is governed by strict rules to ensure that the fragile environment remains protected at the same time it is enjoyed by visitors.

Cozumel has many rewarding dive sites that are classified primarily by skill level and the depth of the dive. The reefs are all off the western (leeward) coast. Paradise Reef, a series of three separate reefs lying about 200 yards offshore, is the only reef accessible from the beach. The marine life here is abundant, and the shallow depth (40 to 50 feet) is suitable for novice divers. Another good location for beginning divers is Yucab Reef, where the swift currents attract barracuda.

Tormentos Reef is suitable for intermediate divers. Colorful coral heads, valleys of sand and marine life that includes moray eels, angelfish, grouper and snapper can be found at depths of 50 to 70 feet. San Francisco Reef is the shallowest of Cozumel's wall dives—half a mile of reef broken into three sections that is teeming with sea life. The Santa Rosa Wall is a very popular deep dive; the wall begins at a depth of 50 feet and drops straight down, with sponge-covered coral overhangs and a myriad little caves and tunnels to explore.

Palancar Reef is one of the island's best known adventurous things to do, and with good reason; the marine environment is full of caverns, tunnels and huge, tightly packed coral heads. Colombia Reef matches it in underwater grandeur; the towering pinnacles of coral are

pocked with caverns and tunnels. Divers are joined by large turtles, rays and barracuda.

The peak diving season is June through August, when the Caribbean waters are calm and warm and hotel rates tend to be lower. A wetsuit top is recommended for winter diving. when water temperatures are slightly lower. Night dives, underwater photography or making a customized video are among the available options. A scale map of all of Cozumel's reefs, complete with water depths and other information, can be obtained from most of the local dive shops.

A variety of travel packages, which usually include airfare, accommodations and diving costs, can be booked in the United States. In addition, the island's dive outfits compete vigorously for both seasoned divers and beginners, offering equipment rentals, instruction, guides and organized expeditions that range from an afternoon to several days.

Many hotels organize their own dive trips as well, and their facilities, while likely to be more expensive, also are more convenient. If you're not on a packaged trip or making your own arrangements, take the time to investigate credentials, boats and equipment; if possible, get the inside scoop from a diver familiar with the area. It's customary to tip the dive crew, as they are responsible for your safety.

Aqua Safari has two locations: in the Safari Inn at Av. Rafael Melgar #429 (at Avenida 5 Sur), and at the Cozumel Palace all-inclusive resort in the southern hotel zone; phone (987) 869-0610 or (987) 872-9439, respectively. Note: Make certain the instructor you choose has PADI certification and is affiliated with one of the island's recompression chambers. The Costamed Cozumel Hyperbaric Center (Costamed Cámara Hiperbárica) is a modern facility located at Calle 1 Sur and Avenida 50 Sur (a block south of Avenida Benito Juárez, the trans-island road); phone (987) 872-5050.

Snorkeling is excellent in Chankanaab Bay, at Playa San Francisco and around the offshore reefs near Colombia Lagoon, at the island's southern tip. An upsidedown plane, deliberately sunk for a movie production, sits on the sandy bottom a short distance from the El Cid La Ceiba hotel pier. If you want to see colorful marine life but don't want to get wet, take a glass-bottom boat trip. Snorkeling gear can be cheaply rented at Playa San Francisco, Chankanaab Adventure Beach Park (see attraction listing) or from the larger hotels, and dive shops offer guided snorkeling excursions to various reefs.

Sport fishing is superb, and Cozumel was an angler's paradise long before it gained renown as a dive destination. Catches differ according to the season. From April through June blue and white marlin, dorado, tuna and sailfish are hooked; fishing for amberjack, barracuda, bonito, mackerel, shark, snapper and wahoo can be done all year. Lagoon fishing yields bonefish, snook and tarpon.

Cozumel Charters excursions depart from the Club Abrigo and Caleta marinas. An all-day guided sport-fishing trip aboard a full-size cabin cruiser (maximum 12 passengers) runs around \$1150 (U.S.); an all-day trip aboard a smaller vessel (minimum three passengers) runs around \$275. Bottom fishing and snorkeling options are also available. For additional information phone (987) 869-8560, (987) 871-4868 (cell), 01 (800) 099-0293 (toll-free long distance within Mexico).

The Cozumel Country Club, on the north side of the island near the airport, has an 18-hole golf course, a pro shop, a driving range, and club and shoe rental. Carts are required. Greens fees are around \$90-\$160 (U.S. dollars are not accepted; payment is by credit card or cash in pesos only). Unlimited golf (only a cart fee per person per day) is available to guests staying at the Melia Cozumel all-inclusive resort, the Playa Azul hotel and the Coral Princess resort. For additional information phone (987) 872-9570.

Rancho Buenavista, a horse ranch on Cozumel's east coast, offers a 4-hour guided horseback riding trek into the interior jungle scrub, with stops at several Mayan ruins, which is a great thing for couples to do. The tours include round-trip transportation from any of the cruise ship piers in San Miguel; phone (987) 872-1537.

Carnaval is held in February on the 3 days preceding Ash Wednesday. Colorful float parades along the *malecón*, masquerade balls, street dances and the "burning" of Juan Carnaval (a Carnaval king) take place during this exuberant fiesta. Rodeo De Lanchas Mexicanas takes place in mid-May; this 2-day fishing tournament includes a catch-and-release option. Cozumel also celebrates the patron saint of San Miguel with a fiesta on Sept. 29.

#### **Beaches and Ruins**

All of Cozumel's beaches are public, even those that appear to be the property of hotels. North of San Miguel are several of the more luxurious accommodations and some condominium developments. Playa San Juan extends to Punta Norte, where the highway ends. This beach is good for swimming and water recreation. Beyond Punta Norte is miniscule Isla de la Pasión, in the middle of calm Abrigo Bay. Local boat owners can take you to this secluded spot, where there are deserted beaches and opportunities for fishing, but no facilities.

South of San Miguel, Avenida Rafael Melgar becomes the coastal highway (Costera Sur) and passes several beach and snorkeling spots. Heading south, the first beach club worth a stop is The Money Bar, next to the Fiesta Americana All Inclusive Hotel (watch for the signed hotel turn-off on the main road). This large *palapa* restaurant has beach chairs, umbrellas and a booth that rents snorkel equipment. The snorkeling is decent—offering things to see just offshore along the Dzul-Ha Reef.

The beach at Chankanaab Adventure Beach Park (see attraction listing) is studded with palapas that provide welcome shade, the sand is soft and powdery, and there are opportunities for snorkeling, diving and interactive dolphin swims. South of the park off the Costera Sur (coastal highway), beautiful Playa San Francisco is hugely popular with those on cruise vacations. Here you'll find public showers and changing rooms, as well as the Carlos 'n Charlies and Playa San Francisco beach clubs. Drinks, food, beach chairs, shade and snorkel gear can all be had for moderate prices and are what to buy on-site.

For a mellower beach scene, continue south to the Playa Palancar beach club (watch for signs). You'll find the usual *palapa* seafood restaurant and beach chairs, minus the cruise ship crowds. For snorkelers, the main draw is an opportunity to see a relatively shallow section of the famous Palancar Reef. Boats leave from shore and charge about \$40 (U.S.) per person for a guided 90-minute snorkel tour.

The eastern (windward) coast is far less developed and thus more dramatic, especially if one is looking for what to do for adventure travel. The beaches, interspersed among rocky coves, are frequently empty. The open Caribbean is intensely turquoise, but the surf and undertows are often strong; swim at your own risk.

Near the entrance to Punta Sur Park (see attraction listing), hand-painted signs with images of Bob Marley direct day-trippers to the Freedom in Paradise Reggae Beach Bar and Grill (Rasta Bar for short). This two-story palapa restaurant has a relaxed tropical feel and sports the requisite red, green and yellow rasta colors, with the reggae icon's tunes playing on constant repeat. The beach is gorgeous, but mostly rocky and not good for swimming.

From the southern end of the island at Punta Celarain, a paved road follows the coast north toward Punta Morena. Dotting the coastline are several beach clubs; this is where to eat, sip a margarita, clock some serious hammock time and watch the surf roll in.

For sunbathing or a lazy beach stroll, try the long powder-white stretch of sand at the appropriately named Playa Bonita. For swimming, the calmest windward shore waters are usually found at Chen Río Beach, a protected cove farther up the road. There are palapa bars at both beaches, but there are better views and better food places at Coconuts, a few minutes' drive north. It's perched on a

high bluff overlooking the Caribbean; ask for an outdoor table to fully appreciate the unbeatable ocean panorama.

Located roughly halfway between Coconuts and the Carretera Transversal (cross-island road) turn-off, the Punta Morena beach club dishes up impressive lunches on a beachfront, white canvas-shaded patio. The fish fajitas are delicious, and a soundtrack of mellow new age music encourages chilling out.

Near Punta Morena the road runs into the end of the east-west Carretera Transversal (cross-island road), about 15 kilometers (9 miles) from San Miguel. Playa Oriente, the rocky beach, is scenic but not safe for swimming. You could, however, spend an afternoon hanging out at Mezcalito's beach club feasting on barbecued shrimp and knocking back ice-cold cervezas.

The San Gervasio Ruins (see attraction listing) are also north of and accessible from the cross-island road. At Km 17.5 on the Costera Sur, a turn-off leads inland about 3 kilometers (2 miles) to El Cedral. One small building is all that remains at this archeological site, believed to be the oldest on the island and the one first discovered by the Spanish.

A white-with-red-trim arch over the road marks the entrance to the small farming settlement of Cedral. The Fiesta of Santa Cruz, which takes place in late April and early May, is Cozumel's oldest annual celebration. The festivities include horse races, craft exhibitions, concerts, sporting events and such regional cultural performances as the Dance of the Hog Head, and there are lots of food places. Shuttle buses run regularly between San Miguel and Cedral during this popular event.

# Dining

Cozumel's restaurant scene centers on San Miguel. Island eateries range from drop-in casual to suitable for a special occasion. There are a variety of cuisines (French, Italian, Japanese) in addition to Mexican, and also a number of local places dishing up terrific Yucatecan food that are off the beaten tourist path but definitely worth searching out.

Guido's, on the waterfront between calles 6 and 8 Norte, is where to eat wood-fired pizzas, but it also offers fish and shellfish dishes. Another house specialty is pan de ajo, bread infused with olive oil, garlic and rosemary. The bougainvillea-draped outdoor dining area is a lovely spot for dinner. For a relaxing break from shopping, Pancho's Backyard, inside the Los Cinco Soles craft store, serves standard Mexican dishes in a courtyard garden setting complete with live marimba music. It's popular with the cruise ship crowd. Menu prices are listed in both dollars and pesos.

La Cocay ("the firefly"), Calle 8 Norte between avenidas 10 and 15 Norte, is a sophisticated spot where you can order a range of appetizers to nibble on, or entrées like sauteed sea scallops, lobster tail or a rib-eye steak.

Lobster aficionados will certainly want to try the Lobster House (La Cabaña del Pescador), in the hotel zone at the northern end of the island (on the east side of the road across from the Playa Azul Hotel). The nearby restaurant is among the best things for couples to do; it's romantic and candlelit, with starfish-studded fishing nets hanging from the ceiling (no air conditioning, though). The steak and lobster dinner, served with steamed vegetables and bread, is a delicious meal. It's cash only. After dinner, ask the waiter to take you for a walk through the gardens out front and shine a flashlight on the massive iguanas sleeping in the trees.

Casa Denis has traditional Yucatecan dishes like cochinita pibil, poc chuc and sopa de lima as well as tortas, tacos and other Mexican standards. Family owned and operated, this longtime local favorite is on the pedestrianonly section of Calle 1 Sur, half a block east of the main plaza. Seating is available inside the historic *casa* or at the sidewalk tables out front.

Some of Cozumel's best eating is at the unassuming places that locals frequent. Taco lovers should seek out El Foco (The Light Bulb), on Avenida 5 Sur a few blocks south of the main plaza. In addition to the usual grilled meats, there are exotic versions like cactus and alligator. This small place is casual and clean, with friendly service.

For a morning pick-me-up, head to one of the local bakeries (panaderías), which offer fresh-baked French rolls (bolillos), sweet breakfast breads (pan dulce) and pastries. Try orejas, crunchy morsels shaped like an ear and drenched with honey, or nut cookies topped with freshly grated coconut. Zermatt, at the corner of Calle 4 Norte and Avenida 5 Norte (a block east of the waterfront) has fresh bread, yummy baked goods and excellent coffee, all for low prices.

Ice cream parlors (neverias) serve ice cream (helado) made with milk or bottled water in flavors both standard (chocolate) and exotic (corn). A paletería is where to buy both ice cream and iced juice drinks (agua frescas). The agua fresca de sandía-watermelon juice mixed with sugar and water—tastes great on a hot day. Another refreshing treat is mango; when the fruit is in season (spring and summer), street vendors sell them on a stick, peeled and carved into different shapes.

Dress is casual at all island food places, and reservations are advised only at the most expensive places. There's no need to worry about health concerns at restaurants that cater to tourists. At local restaurants, follow the standard rule—if it's cooked it should be safe to eat. English isn't spoken at the small family-run places, but it doesn't really matter; most have a wall menu, so just point to what you want to order and remember to add "por favor." Some restaurants close on Sunday. See the Lodgings & Restaurants section for AAA Diamond designated dining establishments.

# **Shopping**

Shops and boutiques lining Avenida Rafael Melgar offer duty-free imported goods, chic sportswear and high-quality folk art reproductions and things to see, as well as T-shirts and cheap souvenirs. The shops cluster around the main plaza and extend for about five blocks north and eight blocks south along the waterfront. Keep in mind, however, that prices will be more expensive here than in the shops on the side streets just a couple of blocks off Melgar. Also, prices at many shops magically drop on days when cruise vacations are few and business is slow.

Five blocks north of the plaza is the Forum Shops, an air-conditioned, marble-floored mini mall on Avenida Rafael Melgar at Calle 8 Norte. Inside you'll find shops selling quality beachwear, jewelry, perfume, silver, glass, tequila and cigars. Ride the escalator to the second floor, where you can peer through glass windows and observe jewelers at work.

Next door is Los Cinco Soles, a big, rambling store that sells a huge selection of crafts, art and clothing imported from all over Mexico. From furniture, ceramics, wood carvings and masks to textiles, hand-blown glass and obsidian figurines, prices on craft items are relatively reasonable. Clothing and jewelry prices, on the other hand, are high. For the budget-minded there's also an endless selection of affordable knickknacks.

Souvenir T-shirt shoppers flock to the Cozumel outpost of Florida's Ron Jon Surf Shop (at the corner of Avenida Rafael Melgar and Calle 4 Norte), where logo T-shirts, caps and souvenirs fly off the shelves.

The north side of the plaza (the pedestrian-only section of Benito Juárez) is chock-a-block with souvenir shops and stalls, most selling identical merchandise (think blankets, sombreros, T-shirts and jewelry). While good quality is hard to come by, a little bargaining should yield low prices. There are gift shops and galleries in the white-trimmed, bright yellow Plaza del Sol building, on the east side of the plaza.

Galería Azul, on Avenida 15 Norte between calles 8 and 10 Norte (about 7 blocks northeast of the main plaza), is owned by an artist who specializes in unique blown-glass pieces incorporating intricate undersea-themed designs. It's open Mon.-Fri. 11-7.

Puro Mar, at the corner of Avenida 5 Sur and Calle 3 Sur (not far from the main plaza), sells top-quality swim trunks, bikinis, flip-flops, kiteboarding gear and other beachy stuff at tourist-inflated prices.

At the Punta Langosta Pier (Avenida Rafael Melgar, just south of Calle 7 Sur), cruise ship passengers disembark and walk directly into the Punta Langosta mall, an open-air building with shops, jewelry stores, clothing boutiques and food places on two levels. Los Cinco Soles has a small satellite location here. Starbucks fans can get their fix at the thatch-roofed franchise fronting the mall. Another open-air mall is at the southernmost cruise ship pier, Puerta Maya (about 5 miles south of San Miguel).

The MEGA grocery store, on Avenida Rafael Melgar just south of downtown San Miguel, is a big supermarket that stocks a variety of fresh produce, meats, seafood, cheeses and other staples.

Are you looking for fun things to do with friends? Chedraui Cozumel Centro, a block inland from the waterfront between calles 15 and 17 Sur, has a Chedraui grocery store, several shops and Cinépolis Cozumel, which shows first-run Hollywood fare and Spanish-language features.

Mercado Municipal, at the corner of Avenida 25 Sur and Calle Dr. Adolfo Rosado Salas, is the island's largest traditional Mexican market. All kinds of fruits and vegetables are for sale, along with fresh and dried chiles, freshly squeezed fruit and carrot juices, honey and *jamaica* (dried hibiscus blossoms) sold by the kilo. When boiled in water and allowed to steep for at least several hours, strained into a pitcher along with sugar and lime juice and then served over ice, the blossoms make a refreshing tea. *Pescaderías* (fish markets) sell freshly caught fish like grouper *(mero)* and snapper *(huachinango)* as well as shrimp, octopus and conch.

# **Nightlife**

After a strenuous day of diving, swimming or exploring most visitors are content to turn in early. Otherwise the outdoor cafés on the south side of the main plaza are pleasant places to eat and enjoy the evening breeze. On Sunday evenings the plaza comes alive when families gather to hear Latin bands or be serenaded by mariachis. This is a good opportunity to mingle with the locals and one of the most fun things to do with kids.

Fans of Polynesian-style tiki bars should drop by Tiki-Tok, a casual second-floor *palapa* bar and restaurant on Avenida Rafael Melgar between Calle 2 Sur and Calle 4 Sur. In addition to the usual lineup of tropical cocktails (mai tais, daiquiris and piña coladas), house specialties include original concoctions named after major Atlantic hurricanes (beware: Wilma packs a wallop). Tables along the front

railing are situated in a sandbox and overlook the waterfront action below; there's live music on select nights.

Parrotheads belly up to the bar at Margaritaville (corner of Avenida Rafael Melgar and Calle 11 Sur), the Cozumel branch of Jimmy Buffett's theme restaurant chain. This place draws big crowds searching for what to do during the day when cruise ships are in port. Revelers pack the outdoor waterfront terrace; DJs spin Buffett tunes and classic rock.

**Tourist information office:** second floor of the Plaza del Sol building behind the main plaza, corner of Avenida Benito Juárez and Avenida 5 Norte.

**ATLANTIS SUBMARINE** departs from the Atlantis office, Km marker 4 on Carretera Chankanaab (Chankanaab Highway), across the street from the Casa del Mar Hotel; passengers are taken from the pier to the submarine via a 12-minute ferry ride. The submarine accommodates 48 passengers for a 40-minute undersea tour of Chankanaab Reef at depths of up to 100 feet. Large portholes running the length of the sub offer views of coral formations and marine life in crystal-clear water.

Note: Entering involves climbing backwards down seven steep stairs (handrails are available). Children under age 4 or under 36 inches tall are not permitted, and the trip is not advised for those prone to claustrophobia or confined to a wheelchair. Phone: (987) 872-5672, or 01 (800) 715-0804 (toll-free long distance within Mexico) for reservation information.

CHANKANAAB ADVENTURE BEACH PARK is on the leeward side of the island, about 9 km (5.5 mi.) s. of town off the Costera Sur (Coastal Highway), the southward extension of Avenida Rafael Melgar. The name, which means "small sea," refers to the natural saltwater lagoon inside the park.

Snorkeling is not permitted in the lagoon, nor is feeding the fish; observation areas are provided. Surrounding the lagoon is a shady botanical garden with tropical and subtropical plant species, many native to Cozumel; for a tip, local youths will give impromptu tours.

The beach fronting the bay is wide and pretty. In addition to swimming and snorkeling (submerged religious statues and encrusted anchors and cannons are popular dive sites), beach activities include snuba (a combination of snorkeling and scuba diving) and Seatrek, an underwater breathing helmet. A small museum has exhibits about local plant, animal and marine life. There also are hammocks for "frond snoozing" and a children's play area. Several dive shops on site, as well as restrooms, changing areas and showers.

Time: Allow 3 hours minimum. Phone: (987) 872-1522 or (987) 872-0093. 🚻 🚘

MUSEUM OF THE ISLAND OF COZUMEL (Museo de la Isla de Cozumel) is on Avenida Rafael Melgar just n. of the main ferry landing, between calles 4 and 6 Norte. The museum chronicles the island's history from its days as a revered Mayan religious destination to settlement by refugees from the 19th-century War of the Castes. An overview of natural history (with information in Spanish and English) focuses on endangered species and local plant and animal life.

A restaurant on the second floor has expansive waterfront views. There also is a bookstore and library with a few selections in English. Guided tours in English are available. Restrooms are provided. Time: Allow 2 hours minimum. Phone: (987) 872-0833.

**PUNTA SUR ECO BEACH PARK** (Parque Punta Sur) is at Km 28 at the southern end of the Costera Sur (coastal highway), about 28 km (17 mi.) s. of the main ferry landing; take the Punta Sur turn-off and proceed about 100 yards down a dirt road to the entrance ticket booth. This national ecological reserve focuses on the conservation of local wildlife, including crocodiles, iguanas, egrets and herons, and therefore has few tourist-oriented facilities.

The Celarain Lighthouse, built in 1934, stands guard at the island's southern point. The steep circular staircase can be climbed, and there are outstanding views from the top. Next to the lighthouse, the Navigation Museum has displays of ship models, nautical artifacts, maps and exhibits relating to lighthouse history.

Flatbed trucks with bench seating shuttle visitors to La Playa mas Hermosa ("The Most Beautiful Beach") for snorkeling. You can swim out to the reef from shore; two floating platforms anchored offshore provide a place to rest en route. Note: Cars are permitted only as far as the lighthouse parking lot.

A map of the park is handed out at the entrance booth. A snack bar at the snorkeling beach sells soda, cold beer and chips. Restrooms are on site. Snorkeling gear can be rented. Time: Allow 2 hours minimum. Phone: (987) 872-0833.



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# WHERE TO EAT



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# ISLA HOLBOX, QUINTANA ROO

The very definition of "laid back," Isla Holbox (hole-BOSH) lies in the Gulf of Mexico 7 miles off the northern tip of the Yucatán Peninsula, or about 40 miles northwest of Cancún as the crow flies. It was once visited by pirates who subsequently intermarried with Mayans living on the island, and descendants of the original families still live here. The first Europeans arrived in 1856 to harvest tropical hardwoods and founded a small village.

Although off the beaten path and not yet taken over by mass tourism, Holbox-some 7 miles long and about a mile wide—is growing, and not just in popularity: Land is being bought for multistory resort hotels, and efforts have begun to control both their construction and the island's ambience. For now, though, this is as good a spot as any to get away from it all.

And getting away from it all is the whole point. On Holbox the key word is relaxation. The exceptionally wide, sandy beaches are ideal for ambling. Shell collectors will delight in the variety of intact, unbroken seashells deposited on the beach by gulf currents. The water is warm, shallow, relatively clear and emerald green, without the dangerous undertows and large waves that can affect Quintana Roo's Caribbean coast beaches. The only thing the gulf lacks is the dazzling turquoise hues of the Caribbean.

Other pleasures are of the laid-back variety as wellpaddle boating and kayaking, strolling around the village or just lazing the afternoon away in a hammock. A daily ritual is sunset watching from the beach or the main pier in town, a view that takes in fishing boats silhouetted against the sky. A more adrenaline-fueled activity is the sport of kite surfing, which utilizes a surfboard with foot straps and a large kite that together propel a user both through the air and on the water.

Holbox Village has a prototypical tropical seaside look. The streets are sand; golf carts, bikes and walking are the preferred modes of transportation. Dogs nap in the shade. Dust devils swirl down the sandy streets. Local kids shoot hoops on the main plaza's basketball court. Tourists snooze on the beach. The wood and cinder block buildings are painted bright colors and roofed with either corrugated tin or traditional thatched palapas. Fancy? No—but a bit of paradise nevertheless.

## **Practicalities**

There's a reason that Isla Holbox is known for its tranquility—getting there involves a bit of effort. The island is about a 3-hour drive from Cancún via free Mex. 180 (not toll highway Mex. 180-D) west to the Nuevo X-Can exit (signed "Nuevo X-Can/Kantunil"). The highway runs

north to the land's end village of Chiquilá and south to the ruins of Cobá. Toward Chiquilá the road becomes very narrow, and sections of it are rough.

Vehicles can be left at a guarded parking lot in Chiquilá for a daily fee of about \$6 (U.S.), cash only. Estacionamiento Cirilo has covered spaces and is located on the east (right) side of Avenida Delfines (Chiquilá's main drag) as you drive into the heart of town. The lot is next door to the Hotel La Puerta del Sol. If the lot is full, there are other lots along the waterfront, closer to the ferry pier. No matter where you park, do not leave valuables in your vehicle. There also is a twice-daily car ferry, but you won't need a car on the island.

Second-class buses travel to Chiquilá from the central bus station in downtown Ciudad Cancún (at the intersection of avenidas Tulum and Uxmal in front of the Plaza Caribe Hotel). There are normally three departures a day for Holbox; the earliest bus leaves around 7:30 a.m. A private taxi from downtown Cancún to Chiquilá costs about \$85 (U.S.) one way; fare from the Cancún Hotel Zone is about \$95. On the other hand, the fare for an airport-approved taxi departing from Cancún Airport is outrageous (several hundred dollars). It's best to arrange a private transfer prior to your trip; a few Holbox hotels offer this service.

From Chiquilá, a ferry service and water taxis take passengers on the 30-minute ride across Yalahau Lagoon to the island. The "9 Hermanos" ferry ticket booth is located on the pier; one-way fare is 100 pesos. Departures are approximately every 2 hours; the last crossing departs at 9:30 p.m. It's also possible to hire a private water taxi; expect to pay \$35 to \$40 (U.S.) for a ride to the island. **Note:** Water taxis are not permitted on the lagoon after dusk.

Golf cart taxi fares are inexpensive, and a ride from the ferry dock to your hotel (including properties outside of downtown) shouldn't cost more than around 35 pesos. While most everything of visitor interest on Holbox is within a 10- or 20-minute walk, renting a golf cart might be a good idea if the weather is too hot for foot travel or you're staying at a hotel on the beach east of town.

There are several rental agencies *(rentadoras)* that all charge basically the same rates. Turística Monkey's, on the west side of Calle Tiburon Ballena (just north of Aguilar), rents carts for 150 pesos per hour, 800 pesos for 8 hours and 1,000 pesos for 24 hours. Rentadora Moguel, across from the plaza at the corner of Calle Igualdad and Tiburon Ballena, also rents carts.

There are a handful of ATMs on Holbox (ask at your hotel for the locations), although it is wise to bring plenty of cash since ATMs in Mexico are notorious for being out of order. Most local businesses prefer cash (pesos or U.S. dollars), though a few establishments do accept credit

cards. You can check your email and the weather in airconditioned comfort at Internet Cyber Shark, on Calle Igualdad just east of Avenida Carite.

Aerosaab, a regional airline, can arrange private flights from Cancún, Cozumel and Playa del Carmen to the small airstrip on Isla Holbox. The short flights (20 minutes to 1 hour) are aboard a four-seat Cessna aircraft. Aerosaab also offers all-day whale shark tours that depart from Cancún, Cozumel and Playa del Carmen.

During the whale shark off-season, consider the daylong tour that flies out of Playa del Carmen only and visits Bird Island, Yalahau spring and Holbox Village. For schedule, fare and reservations information phone (984) 873-0501.

# Recreation

Many of Holbox's approximately 1,500 permanent residents are fishermen. They set out each morning before sunrise, pulling in catches of grouper, barracuda, red snapper, yellowtail and shark. Most families on the island make their living from commercial fishing or diving for conch, lobster and octopus. Local skippers also serve as guides for sport-fishing excursions; the waters around Cape Catoche (Cabo Catoche), where the Gulf of Mexico and the Caribbean merge, are fertile fishing grounds. Boat trips for deep sea or fly fishing can be arranged at the main pier.

Yalahau is the name of the lagoon between Isla Holbox and the mainland as well as a natural spring-fed pond on the island that once was a source of drinking water for Mayan fishermen. According to folklore the pond was the private swimming pool of a Mayan king and later the refuge of a pirate, "Yellow Beard." Local legend also maintains that Yalahau is a fountain of youth. It can be reached by boat, and while swimmers may not feel any younger, the clear, cool water is decidedly refreshing on a hot day.

Isla Pájaros, or Bird Island, is a small islet only 200 feet wide that lies in a shallow portion of Yalahau Lagoon. This protected wildlife sanctuary is accessible only by boat. Covered by thick stands of mangrove, cacti and underbrush, it is a feeding and nesting haven for more than 150 different species. Flamingos visit from April to October; other frequently seen birds include frigates, white ibises, snowy egrets, spoonbills, pelicans and ducks. The island also is home to iguanas, horseshoe crabs and such plants as bromeliads and wild orchids.

Tours to Isla Pájaros depart from the main pier on Holbox Island. In order to protect the fragile ecosystem, visitors are not allowed to walk on the island; birds can be observed in their natural surroundings from elevated walkways and observation lookout points.

The most notable attraction Holbox offers is the opportunity to get up close and personal with whale sharks (tiburon ballena in Spanish). The world's largest living fish species, it attains a length of up to 45 feet. Also called domino shark for the distinctive pattern of pale yellow spots marking its body, the whale shark—unlike many of its more fearsome brethren—is harmless to humans. This shark is a filter feeder: It pumps sea water through five large pairs of gills that act as sieves, trapping plankton, algae, krill, small vertebrates and other food that are then swallowed.

The manta ray, another giant marine animal, is much less frequently spotted. A relative of the shark, it is the largest ray in the world—up to 25 feet wide when measured across the pectoral fins, and weighing more than 1.5 tons. The manta, unlike other species of ray, does not have a stinging spine. And like the whale shark, it too is a filter feeder, feasting on plankton, small fish and crustaceans that are swept into its wide mouth with the aid of two fleshy lobes that resemble horns (hence the nickname "devil ray"). These solitary creatures are harmless to swimmers and divers and thus a highly prized sighting.

Whale sharks and manta rays visit the waters around Holbox from mid-June to early September. Boat trips to the whale shark feeding waters (about 1 hour away from the Holbox pier) allow visitors the opportunity to swim and snorkel alongside the surprisingly docile giants without touching them (scuba diving is not permitted). Only two snorkelers and a guide are allowed in the water at a time, and the first thing you'll notice is how fast these jumbo fish move. If you're not a strong swimmer, keeping up with them is out of the question. Regardless, simply being in the open water next to a whale shark is an incredible once-in-a-lifetime experience for most visitors.

**Note:** Although it is not guaranteed that you'll see a shark, the probability in the heart of the season (July and August) is high. If you're visiting at this time, make lodging and tour reservations far in advance.

There are about ten whale shark tour operators in town. Holbox regulars have their favorites, and two of them always rank at or near the top. Operadora Turística Monkey's (aka Monkey Tours) is the largest outfitter in town, and their red-and-white boats are manned by some of the best whale shark spotters on the island.

Excursions depart early in the morning and last 5 to 6 hours. Each boat takes a maximum of 10 people; snorkel equipment and lunch are included. Tours are not recommended for children under 8. Space is limited (especially in season), and advance reservations are necessary. No matter which tour operator you choose, expect to pay around \$120 (U.S.) per person. For more information on

Turística Monkey's and to make reservations, visit their office on the west side of Calle Tiburon Ballena, just north of Aguilar, or phone (984) 875-2488. Tours offered by Hotel Mawimbi also are well regarded; for information phone (984) 875-2003.

Holbox Whale Shark Tours on Calle Bravo offers allinclusive trip packages that include ground transportation to and from Cancún International Airport and hotel accommodations in addition to a guided all-day whale shark excursion. Trips are offered seasonally, mid-May to mid-September. For additional information or to book reservations phone (984) 875-2107 or (305) 396-6987 (from the United States).

# Shopping, Dining and Nightlife

On Calle Igualdad, east of the plaza, Artesanía Las Chicas specializes in handmade henequen clothing and also has a selection of purses, jewelry and incense. Artesanías Puesta del Sol sells beachwear, flip-flops, tote bags and jewelry, plus an array of good-quality Mexico keepsakes, including hand-painted margarita glasses.

West of the plaza, seashell collectors head for Lalo, on Avenida Canané just south of Avenida Coldwell. The shop is on the second floor of a thatch-roofed house. You can't miss the sign out front. Inside, polished seashells of all shapes and sizes command high prices. Bargains come in the way of souvenir knickknacks and cool items like handbags made from seashells.

Restaurants are simple and casual. Restaurante Zarabanda, a block south of the main plaza (look for the thatched roof and red-and-white trim) is a rustic, familyowned place that serves fresh seafood like grilled fish filets and conch or shrimp ceviche. You also can get breakfast here. Viva Zapata, just west of the main plaza, is a popular Mexican restaurant with sombrero-shaped lamps dangling over the tables and pictures of Pancho Villa covering the walls. Ask for a table on the breezy second-floor balcony and try the surf-and-turf platter for two. The food is very good, but service can be slow.

Always busy at dinner time, Restaurante y Pizzeria Edelyn bakes tasty thin crust pies in a log cabin-like building opposite the southeast corner of the plaza. While most first-timers order the house specialty, lobster pizza (covered with garlicky chunks of crustacean), don't overlook the linguine or the #10 pizza, loaded with the works. Seating is inside (hot in summer), on the front porch or at plastic tables set out in the street.

At funky La Isla del Colibre, opposite the southwest corner of the plaza, you can ponder the portraits of Frida Kahlo on the walls while you wait for your meal to arrive. Housed in a colorful clapboard building decorated with surrealist art, the restaurant specializes in seafood and

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also serves excellent breakfasts. This is a favorite haunt of street performers and musicians; bring change for *propinas* (tips).

In town, beachfront dining is limited to three restaurants: Cariocas (favored by locals), Buena Vista Grill (romantic but expensive) and the casual Villa Mar. Tables at the latter are shaded by mini *palapa* umbrellas and offer views of the beach and pier. Breakfasts are hearty, tasty and (late risers take note) served until 1 p.m. Mexican standards and drink specials draw a steady stream of tourists the rest of the day.

It won't take you long to figure out that there's no wacky Cancún-type nightlife on Holbox, but there *are* a handful of mellow bars on the west side of the plaza. On Saturday nights the plaza fills up with locals and tourists alike who come to watch live music and traditional Mayan dances performed under a white concrete bandshell. Think of it as the island's very own Hollywood Bowl.

# **ISLA MUJERES, QUINTANA ROO**

Laid-back Mexican beach vacations don't get much better than Isla Mujeres (EES-lah moo-HEH-rehs). While single male travelers might be disappointed to find that the male-female ratio on the "Island of Women" is actually rather balanced, no one can deny Isla's considerable charms.

This little slip of an island in Mujeres Bay is within sight of Cancún's Hotel Zone, and getting there on a ferry boat is part of the fun. As soon as you leave the Cancún dock you're surrounded by intensely hued water that ranges from sea foam green to pastel aquamarine to deep, deep turquoise, the colors constantly shifting with the interplay of sun and clouds. The little boat bobs up and down on the waves, sending salt spray flying.

First appearing as an indistinct blur on the horizon, Isla Mujeres begins to take shape as the boat draws closer. Details emerge—palm trees, clapboard buildings, fishing boats. And before you know it you've reached another dock and disembark to a scene that is a bit different than the one you left.

Gold-seeking Spanish explorers led by Francisco Hernández de Córdoba accidentally discovered Isla Mujeres in 1517 after a storm blew their expedition off course. The origin of the name is based on two legends. One maintains that seafaring buccaneers used the island as a hideaway for stowing their female captives; slave trader Fermín Mundaca built a beautiful hacienda here in an effort to woo an island girl. But a more likely explanation is that it refers to the carved stone images of Ixchel, the Mayan goddess of love and fertility, discovered by the Spaniards.

After the era of pirates and smugglers passed, Isla Mujeres was quite content to be just another idyllic Caribbean island where people fished for a living. It was discovered again during the 1960s, this time by hippies and beach bums who dug the laid-back atmosphere. And since Cancún's ascendance to world-famous tourist destination Isla has gotten more and more spillover from its big, flashy mainland neighbor. But it's also a place where people live; while you're on vacation, for residents it's just another day. And the chance to be part of daily Mexican life—if only for a few hours—is what makes this island special.

You'll get into the spirit as soon as you start strolling along Avenida Rueda Medina, the *malecón*, which runs along the waterfront. The sidewalk is a jumble of sunburned gringos, locals and occasional dogs that might suddenly plop down under the shade of a coconut palm (the sound of palm fronds rustling in the ever-present breeze is a constant backdrop). Vendors sit next to their displays—bead necklaces, seashells, starfish, sandals, sombreros. The street is clogged with taxis, mopeds, golf carts and scooters, but no one is really in a hurry. Stop and breathe in the aroma of fresh fish grilling at a *loncheria* (casual open-air restaurant).

Then explore a few of the downtown side streets. Narrow Avenida Hidalgo, two blocks inland from the waterfront, is for pedestrians only, and thus invites browsers to linger at the many shops and vendor stalls. Turn a corner and you might see a group of school kids in immaculate uniforms skipping along the sidewalk. Many of the buildings have festive crayon colors—pink, peach, lime green, bright blue. Stop at a cafe for a cup of coffee or a freshly blended fruit smoothie. Above all, relax.

Many people spend their entire vacation on Isla Mujeres, since accommodations run the gamut from nofrills in-town motels to exclusive beachside retreats. But one of the island's calling cards is that it's just a half-hour boat ride away. You can leave Cancún in the morning, go shopping, have lunch and take an afternoon ferry back. You can leave around noon, go snorkeling or while away an afternoon sunning on the beach, and be back in time for dinner. Or you can leave in the late afternoon, enjoy dinner and a fun evening on Isla, and catch the last ferry back to the mainland. It's the perfect day trip.

#### **Practicalities**

Located about 5 miles off the easternmost tip of the Yucatán Peninsula, Isla Mujeres is accessible by ferry from mainland Puerto Juárez; from the Cancún airport, a one-way taxi ride will run you about \$60 (U.S.). There also are two Cancún Hotel Zone departure points for passenger ferries to the island: the El Embarcadero dock at

Km marker 4 on Boulevard Kukulcán and the dock at Plava Tortugas, Km marker 7 on Boulevard Kukulcán.

UltraMar ferries depart from the Gran Puerto dock on Avenida López Portillo in Puerto Juárez daily at 7, 9, 11, 3, 5 and 7, then depart hourly until 11:30 p.m. The final departure from Isla Mujeres back to Gran Puerto is at midnight. The trip takes about 15-20 minutes; one-way fare is 160 pesos, round trip fare 300 pesos. Double-check the time of the final departure back to Cancún when you arrive.

UltraMar ferries depart from the El Embarcadero dock daily at 9:15, 11:45, 1, 2:15 and 4:30. The final departure from Isla Mujeres back to El Embarcadero is at 5:15 p.m. One-way fare is \$14 (U.S.); round-trip fare \$19. UltraMar boats also depart from the Playa Tortugas dock daily on the hour 9-5, returning from Isla Mujeres approximately every 30 minutes 9:30-5:30. One-way fare is \$14 (U.S.); round-trip fare \$19.

If you're basing a vacation in Isla Mujeres and have several pieces of luggage, taxis line up by the two town docks for the short ride to the hotels concentrated in town and scattered along the beaches. The fare shouldn't be more than a few dollars. Taxis also can be hired (at an hourly rate) for a tour of the island or to reach beaches at the southern end. A municipal bus travels from the Posada del Mar Hotel on Avenida Rueda Medina south to Playa Lancheros; the fare is inexpensive. Check with the tourist information office on Avenida Rueda Medina for bus schedules.

Renting a "moto," the local term for mopeds, or an electric golf cart is an easy way to get around, and there are several places in town that rent both (many of the hotels also rent golf carts). Keep in mind, however, that the rental fee does not include insurance. Some hotels also rent bicycles, which cost considerably less.

The "downtown" section of Isla Mujeres occupies the island's northern end. The main street, referred to locally as the malecón, is Avenida Rueda Medina, which runs the length of the island. The main streets are north-south avenidas Guerrero and Hidalgo, and east-west avenidas Madero and Morelos. These are all narrow, one-way, pedestrian-friendly streets where traffic (mostly taxis and mopeds) moves slowly. The ferry docks, in-town hotels, restaurants, shops, travel agencies, City Hall, the police station, the post office, a couple of farmacias (pharmacies), the island's one bank, casas de cambio (currency exchange offices) and several internet cafés are all within a compact area of about four by six blocks.

Islander, a monthly magazine available at hotels, provides tourist information. A Red Cross (Cruz Roja) clinic is about 5 kilometers (3 miles) south of town, near Playa Lancheros; phone (998) 877-0280.

# Things to Do on the Island

The most popular beach is Playa Norte, located at the northern edge of town. It's a lovely white-sand beach sprinkled with coconut palms and thatch-roofed palapas. The water is clear, calm and shallow, perfect for swimming or wading. Umbrellas, chairs, jet-skis, three-wheeled water "trikes" and other equipment can be rented. You also may see discreet topless sunbathers at this beach.

Other options are Playa Lancheros and Playa Garrafón, both toward the opposite end of the island on the western (leeward) side. Playa Lancheros is the southernmost beach on the local bus route. The surf is rougher along Isla's eastern coastline, which faces the open Caribbean.

At the very southern tip of the island, on a bluff overlooking the sea, once stood the reconstructed remains of a Mayan temple believed to have been built in honor of the fertility goddess Ixchel. Archeologists believe that the Maya, en route to Cozumel on pilgrimages to worship Ixchel, stopped over at Isla Mujeres. In 1988 Hurricane Gilbert reduced it to a pile of stones, but there are fine views of the sea. A 30-foot-tall lighthouse nearby was left standing. A taxi ride from downtown costs about \$10 (U.S.).

Branching east off Rueda Medina, a paved road follows the eastern edge of the island back toward town. If you've rented a golf cart, this is a nice route with plenty of pulloffs to take in views of the open sea.

Offshore coral reefs and the Cave of the Sleeping Sharks (Cueva de Los Tiburones Durmientes) attract scuba divers. The underwater cave, off the northern tip of Contoy Island National Park (see attraction listing), was discovered in the late 1960s. The reason for the sharks' seemingly narcotized state has been attributed to everything from varying salinity levels to lack of carbon dioxide in the underwater caverns to constant currents that supply the oxygen allowing the creatures to remain stationary. Whatever the cause, this is a challenging dive to depths of 150 feet or more, with no guarantee that the sharks will be around.

Another site for advanced divers is the Ultrafreeze (El Frio) wreck, a cargo ship that caught fire in 1979 and was towed to the open sea to be sunk. Many forms of marine life, including small and large fish, stingrays and turtles, can be seen.

Manchones Reef, just off the island's southern tip, is more than 2,500 feet long. Blue tangs, wrasses, parrot fish, angelfish and red snapper are among the tropical species that swarm over the reef, which exhibits a variety of coral formations. The water depth is 30 to 40 feet. Manchones also is the site of the underwater statue Cross of the Bay (Cruz de la Bahía).

The summer months of June, July and August, when the water is calm, are best for diving. Aqua Adventures Eco Divers, one block east of the UltraMar ferry dock at the corner of Avenida Juárez and Avenida Morelos, offers certification classes. Their knowledgeable instructors can arrange trips to local dive sites, as well as snorkeling and whale shark excursions; phone (998) 236-4316. Carey Dive Center, Av. Matamoros #13-A at Avenida Rueda Medina (3 blocks north of the passenger ferry dock), also offers instruction and organizes snorkeling trips; phone (998) 877-0763.

The Boatmen's Cooperative (Cooperativa Isla Mujeres), on Avenida Rueda Medina at the foot of Avenida Madero (near the ferry dock), handles snorkeling and sport-fishing excursions as well as day trips to Isla Contoy. Some outings require a minimum number of passengers. Billfish (swordfish and marlin) are a good possibility in April and May; during the rest of the year catches include bonito, grouper and red snapper.

# Shopping, Dining and Nightlife

Although craft shop prices are lower than in Cancún, bargaining is still the best way to come out ahead. Wood carvings, ceramic and clay figurines, pottery, handmade clothing, T-shirts, and decorative objects made of sea and snail shells are among the possible purchases. Sidewalk vendors set up small displays along Avenida Rueda Medina in the vicinity of the passenger ferry dock, selling shells, jewelry, trinkets and souvenirs. The other side of the street is lined with gift shops.

Avenida Hidalgo, 2 blocks in from the waterfront, is a pedestrian-only thoroughfare with more shops and vendor stands, along with several restaurants that have outdoor tables. It's a pleasant little street to wander along. At Galería de Arte Mexico, Av. Guerrero #3, the handicrafts for sale include ceramics, silver jewelry, talavera tile and hand-painted Oaxacan rugs.

One of the nicest restaurants on the island is Zazil-Ha, in the Hotel Na Balam on Calle Zazil (at Playa Norte). The seafood dishes are well-prepared, and diners have a choice of eating indoors or in an open-air garden setting.

At Roticeria La Mexicana, on Avenida Hidalgo near Avenida Adolfo Lopez Mateos, you can get a whole roasted chicken that comes with rice, beans, marinated onions and tortillas. It's a good takeout meal for a beach picnic.

The beachside restaurant at Playa Lancheros offers fresh ceviche and the Yucatecan style of fish preparation known as *tikin xic*. Look for the thatched *palapa* roof. If you want to sample local cookery, check out the food vendors at the Municipal Market (Mercado Municipal), on Avenida Guerrero next to the post office.

Isla Mujeres is not known for frenetic nightlife, which suits most visitors just fine. The *palapas* along Playa Norte are a great place for sunset watching. Most of the restaurant bars have a late afternoon happy hour, and a few offer live music and dancing.

**Tourist information office:** Av. Rueda Medina #130, between Madero and Morelos (just north of the ferry dock). Open Mon.-Fri. 9-4. **Phone:** (998) 877-0307.

CONTOY ISLAND NATIONAL PARK (Parque Nacional Isla Contoy) is about 32 km (20 mi.) n. of Isla Mujeres. The uninhabited island is the site of a wildlife reserve and bird sanctuary. Four miles long and half a mile wide, Contoy has nature trails winding through tropical vegetation. Pelicans, egrets, cormorants and flamingos are among the species that nest here. In addition to park rangers, iguanas, turtles and hermit crabs live on the island, and marine life—which includes seasonal armies of migrating lobsters—is plentiful. There also is a fine outdoor nature museum.

Contoy is protected and can only be visited on a guided tour. Tours depart from Isla Mujeres, Cancún and Puerto Juárez. The Isla Mujeres tours are run by people familiar with the island and dedicated to preserving its natural environment, and the boats are smaller. But regardless of the operator, the itinerary is the same: snorkeling en route to the island, time to relax or explore, and a grilled fish lunch prepared Mayan style (tikin-xic), plus an open bar. Activities include visiting an aviary, hiking along protected dunes, snorkeling or simply resting on the beach prior to the return voyage.

Life jackets and snorkeling gear are provided. Insect repellent is advised. The nature museum has restroom facilities. **Phone:** (998) 578-7097.

**DOLPHIN DISCOVERY** is at Villa Discovery on Discovery Island, reached via a bridge across Makax Lagoon. At this facility visitors can experience interactive encounters with dolphins. There are three different 1-hour programs that range from non-swimming sessions (includes touching the animals and watching them perform) to full-fledged water encounters. The program also features an educational video (watching it is required before you can enter the water). For trips from Cancún transportation is aboard the 110-foot cruiser *Discovery*.

Children must be accompanied by an adult. **Time:** Allow 2 hours minimum. **Phone:** (998) 193-3360, (866) 393-5158 (toll-free from the United States), or 01 (800) 727-5391 (toll-free long distance within Mexico).

**GARRAFÓN PARK** is at the southern end of the island off Carretera Garrafón, Km marker 6. This "natural park" is a haven for multicolored tropical fish that can be seen in calm, clear water with an average depth of 13 feet. Ziplines allow thrill seekers to skim above the island's coastal cliffs. Garrafón's swimming pool has a waterfall and a view of the Caribbean. Two ocean platforms anchored to a sandy bottom near the reef, one for sunbathers and one with a diving board, are connected by ropes that can be crossed "monkey" style, walking on one while hanging on to the other.

If all this sounds too strenuous, relax in the shady Garden of Hammocks and listen to the breeze rustling the palm fronds. In order to protect the environment, use of biodegradable sunscreen (available at the park's gift shops) is advised.

Locker rooms and showers are provided. Time: Allow 4 hours minimum. **Phone:** (998) 193-3360, or (866) 393-5158 (toll-free from the United States).



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# PLAYA DEL CARMEN, QUINTANA ROO

Playa del Carmen is the Riviera Maya's fastest growing destination. It's still first and foremost a beach hangout, but one with enough variety to satisfy all but the most jaded travelers. The mood is relaxed and informal, the ambience decidedly international. Lots of Europeans visit Playa, and many hotels and restaurants have European owners. There's also a large American and Canadian expat presence.

Environmentalism is actively promoted; visitors are encouraged to participate in activities like helping to preserve the nesting sites of sea turtles, a threatened species. Some small-scale accommodations promote a "back to nature" slant; at these rustic, thatch-roofed seaside "eco-hotels" guests participate in yoga classes or meditate in a flotation tank.

But Playa has also become very much a first-class travel destination. In recent years a slew of luxury resorts, including many all-inclusive properties, have sprung up along the coast both north and south of the city. These accommodations are just as exclusive and luxurious as their counterparts in Cancún, offering every possible amenity that guarantees a pampered, worry-free beach vacation.

Resort complexes like Mayakoba, just north of Playa, marry luxury with the natural environment; hotel architects collaborated with geologists and engineers to integrate natural waterways and existing terrain into a master-planned development. Three world-class resorts—the Banyan Tree Mayakoba, the Fairmont Mayakoba and the Rosewood Mayakoba—are connected by a system of man-made canals that at first glance you might think were just another part of the watery coastal landscape. Each of these properties has a state-of-the-art spa where you can rejuvenate in a eucalyptus-infused steam room or relax in the cool, clear waters of a cenote.

While you can still kick back at humble taquerias or purchase cheap street food from vendors in the vicinity of Playa's main plaza, seriously good restaurants—most of them located at the expensive resorts—employ chefs who are pushing creative boundaries when it comes to both ingredients and presentation. And it wasn't that long ago that nightlife consisted primarily of a handful of laid-back beach bars. These days there are more dance clubs than you can shake a stick at, and luxury resorts offer their guests an array of entertainment options, from classy cocktail lounges to on-premises nightclubs.

The city is also conveniently close to several major tourist attractions, including the Xcaret theme park, the Xplor eco-park and the Rio Secreto nature preserve. Cancún is about an hour's drive north, Tulum about a 45-minute drive south. And Cozumel, another tourist hot spot, is a short ferry ride away.

About 20 kilometers (12 miles) south of Playa del Carmen off Mex. 307 is Puerto Aventuras, one of this region's first planned resort communities. Recreational activities include tennis and a nine-hole course at the Puerto Aventuras Golf & Racquet Club, scuba diving and deep-sea fishing trips departing from the Puerto Aventuras Marina, and swimming with dolphins at Dolphin Discovery, within the Dreams Puerto Aventuras resort.

The CEDAM Museum (Museo Subacuatico CEDAM), or the "Shipwreck Museum" to locals, is at the northern end of the marina near the Omni Puerto Aventuras Beach Resort. The small space displays coins, dishes, cannons and other artifacts recovered by divers from 18th-century shipwrecks that occurred off the Quintana Roo coast. It's normally open Mon.-Sat. 9-5, although hours may vary; phone (984) 134-9483.

#### **Practicalities**

Playa del Carmen is about 68 kilometers (42 miles) south of Cancún via Mex. 307, the coastal highway. Several turnoffs run east into town. Avenida 34 accesses the northern end of Playa. Avenida Constituyentes and Avenida Juárez

will take you downtown; Avenida Juárez goes straight to the main plaza and the ferry pier to Cozumel.

An elevated overpass built directly over Mex. 307, some 6 kilometers (4 miles) in length, allows drivers heading to points south to bypass the city completely. There are entrance and exit ramps at key cross streets.

Most visitors fly into Cancún International Airport. A private taxi to Playa from the airport is expensive, averaging about \$75 (U.S.) one way. USA Transfers provides one way or round-trip private van transportation to most major Playa hotels; look for the uniformed greeters holding signs outside Terminal 3. One-way fares range from around \$60-\$85 (U.S.) per vehicle, depending on the number of passengers (up to 10 for vans). Pay the driver in full at the airport (cash only); both dollars and pesos are accepted. For more information or to make reservations phone (998) 914-0290.

A less expensive option is taking the bus. The ADO bus line provides frequent daily first-class, reserved-seat service from the airport to Playa. One-way fare is about \$15 (U.S.). Bus tickets can be purchased at Terminal 2 (which receives mostly domestic and some international flights) or Terminal 3 (which receives most flights from the United States); a free shuttle runs between the two terminals. Look for the ticket counter inside the terminal entrance doors, or purchase a ticket from the driver; the buses, which have "ADO" printed on the side and the destination on the front, pick up passengers outside the terminals. A stop is often made at Puerto Morelos en route.

There are two bus stations in town. Buses from the Cancún airport arrive at the main (old) downtown station at the corner of Avenida Juárez and 5th Avenue (Avenida 5). Buses to and from Tulum, Chetumal and other longhaul points south, as well as from Mérida and other interior points, arrive at the ADO station at the corner of Avenida 20 and 12th Street.

Drivers on large yellow tricycles (triciclos), the Mexican version of a rickshaw, congregate in front of the downtown station. If you don't have much luggage, this is an inexpensive way to get to nearby hotels. It's also a fun way to take a sightseeing spin.

Bicycle rental shops charge around \$10 (U.S.) per day. If you choose to bike around Playa, keep a couple of things in mind. First and foremost, vehicle traffic can be heavy and bicyclists are not given the right of way; ride defensively. Riding is not allowed on 5th Avenue, so walk your bike along this pedestrian thoroughfare. There's a bike path for cyclists and *triciclos* along 10th Avenue. Helmets are not required, but it's a good idea to wear one; bring your own or purchase one in town.

Taxi fares within the downtown area shouldn't be more than 50 pesos. From the Playacar resort area south of town to downtown, fares average about 80 pesos. Confirm the rate with the driver before getting in the cab. Many drivers don't speak English, so it helps to have directions to your destination written down. Hotel-affiliated taxis tend to cost more; check the posted rates where you're staying.

You also can hire a taxi for the day if you don't have a rental car and plan on taking a few road trips up or down the coast. The driver will take you to the places you want to visit and wait while you sightsee. Rates are negotiable, but expect to pay a minimum of about \$75 (U.S.).

Three ferry companies carry passengers between Playa del Carmen and Cozumel. The centrally located ferry pier is off Avenida 5, a block south of the main plaza. Cars are not transported; there is a guarded parking lot across the street from the pier. Departures to Cozumel are approximately every hour (and sometimes on the half-hour) throughout the day. Cold beverages can be purchased on board.

Tickets can be purchased at booths near the foot of the pier. If you're going on a day trip to Cozumel, simply arrive at the pier early and buy a ticket for the next available trip. Early morning rides may sell out due to workers commuting to the island, but in general seats are always available. Double-check the schedule at the pier, and in particular confirm the time of the last departure from the island. Tickets also can be purchased at the Cozumel ferry dock.

The trip takes about 45 minutes aboard modern, airconditioned vessels. The one-way fare charged by UltraMar is 200 pesos and Mexico WaterJets is 180 pesos. The Barcos Caribe fare is 135 pesos.

Note: Ferry schedules are subject to change due to weather conditions, as seas can sometimes be quite rough; make sure you carry appropriate medication if you're prone to seasickness.

Cruise ships dock at the port of Calica (also called Punta Venado), about 13 kilometers (8 miles) south of Playa del Carmen off Mex. 307. Disembarking passengers will find taxis waiting to take them to other Riviera Maya destinations, but no restaurants, services or shopping opportunities; sightseeing activities should be booked in advance online. The closest tourist attraction is the Xcaret ecological theme park, about a mile from the port; it's a pleasant way to spend the day onshore if you're docked at Calica.

Most banks have ATMs; withdrawals are in pesos. You can also find casas de cambio (currency exchange offices) around town. Many shops and restaurants accept U.S. and Canadian dollars as well as pesos.

# **City Layout**

Playa is a hybrid—explosive growth has resulted in a luxury resort boom and a livelier-than-ever tourist scene.

but the small, compact downtown area still has the workaday feel of a typical Mexican town. It bustles with traffic and pedestrians. Shoeshine men set up on the sidewalk; vendors sell hot dogs and hamburgers from wheeled carts. The nicest part of Playa is along the beach, east of Avenida 10 (two blocks inland).

Downtown is laid out in a simple grid pattern and is easy to negotiate. Avenidas run north-south, calles east-west. Traffic is congested, and newer unpaved, sandy streets frequently have water-filled potholes that require careful maneuvering. The busiest area is where Avenida Benito Juárez, one of the principal east-west thoroughfares, ends at Avenida 5 (also called 5th Avenue or Quinta Avenida), in the vicinity of the bus station and the ferry pier to Cozumel.

Parque Fundadores (Founding Fathers Park), the main plaza, is a block east of 5th Avenue and a block south of Avenida Juárez, just off the beach. Shaded by coconut palms and beautified by tropical plants, this little brick-paved square has benches, a gazebo with black wrought-iron trim and a clear view of the turquoise Caribbean; it's a lovely spot to relax. Around the plaza vendors set up tables shaded by brightly colored umbrellas; in fact, almost everywhere you turn there are umbrella-shaded stands selling something.

Rising from the beachfront is the plaza's most dramatic sight, "Portal Maya 2012." This bronze sculpture was created by Guanajuatan artist Arturo Taravez. It commemorates the Mayan calendar and the date Dec. 21, 2012, which the Mayans predicted would be the end of the world. Standing some 50 feet tall, the sculpture depicts two entwined human figures and makes a great photo op.

At one corner of the plaza stands the white stucco Iglesia Nuestra Señora del Carmen, the scene of many weddings. On Sundays there's often a line of people waiting to enter the church for services. Nearby, on the beach, there's also a small children's play area in the shape of a pirate ship.

The Voladores de Papantla give daily performances of the flying pole dance at the plaza. Four dancers, their feet bound with ropes attached to a 100-foot-tall pole, launch themselves into the air while a fifth individual perches atop the pole playing a flute and drum. The ritual, most commonly associated with the city of Papantla in the state of Veracruz, is thought to have originated as a way to appease the rain gods during times of severe drought. Donations are solicited from the assembled audience after this dramatic and death-defying performance.

The tourist action centers on 5th Avenue, just inland from the beach. This pedestrian-only thoroughfare is lined with souvenir and specialty shops, restaurants and cafés from Avenida Juárez north to around Calle 44 (44th Street), a distance of about 1.5 miles. Small boutique hotels and more shops and restaurants are on the side streets just off the west side of 5th Avenue. A relaxed afternoon stroll along Quinta Avenida is the ideal way to experience Playa's beachside charm (wear sunglasses and a hat, and bring a bathing suit just in case). It gets more crowded and rowdier in the evening, when locals as well as tourists hit the bars and nightspots.

The Playacar hotel zone is south of the ferry pier. Residential homes, condos, hotels and all-inclusive resorts are within this designated area; the cobblestoned main thoroughfare is called Paseo Xaman-Ha (sha-MAN hah). A genuine lodging bargain might be found here during the off-season (after Easter through November).

### Recreation

Playa's beaches have the powdery white sand and beautiful turquoise water characteristic of the entire Mexican Caribbean coast, and offshore reefs guarantee good snorkeling and diving. The main public beach, which extends north from the ferry pier to Calle 10 Norte, is the most crowded. It's wide and sandy near the pier, narrowing somewhat as it runs north past restaurants, beach bars and dive shops.

If you prefer fewer crowds and more seclusion, keep walking north past the jetty at the Gran Porto Resort toward the Kool and Mamita's beach clubs, on either side of Calle 28 Norte. The wide sand beaches here are quieter as long as you avoid the activities around the clubs. You can, however, rent an umbrella and a lounge chair from either of these places if you intend to stay the day; just get there early.

Mamita's Beach Club, on the beach at the end of Calle 28. is a popular daytime hangout. It draws a young, party-seeking crowd to a wide beach filled with chaise lounges, cabanas and canopied sun beds, a sparkling-clean pool, and a large restaurant and bar area. DJ music usually starts cranking in the afternoon. Mamita's also regularly features visiting DJ appearances and hosts music festivals. Of course all the amenities aren't free; you'll pay rental fees for chairs, umbrellas and such, and together with food and drink costs your cash expenditure can add up quickly.

Across Calle 28 is the Kool Beach Club, frequented by a somewhat older crowd not as intent on nonstop partying. A set cost entitles you to use a sun deck with lounge chairs and sun beds and a stretch of beach with umbrellas and more loungers. Also included is food at the club's alfresco restaurant, drink service and a beachside massage.

Zenzi Beach Bar and Restaurant, on the beach at the end of Calle 10, is a comfy retreat for a day at the beach. Relaxed and laid back, it has lounge chairs and umbrellas

lined up on the sand and a menu of bar food and cocktails. The music is more laid back as well. There's no entry fee and you can use the amenities as long as you purchase food and drink, so arrive early, especially on weekends.

Outdoor activities like sailing and deep-sea fishing excursions as well as snorkeling and scuba diving trips are all easily arranged. Water sports operators rent kayaks and paddleboards, and a few offer parasailing flights.

Dive Shop Mexico, at the corner of 5th Avenue and Calle 20 Norte (a block north of Avenida Constituyentes), organizes freshwater cenote cavern and ocean reef scuba diving and snorkeling trips. Seasonal activities include swimming with whale sharks during the summer months and bull shark dives in the winter months. Excursions to cenotes usually depart in the morning. If you've never been scuba diving, PADI courses and certifications are offered. Phone (984) 803-3174.

The Playa Scuba Dive Center, at Calle 4 Norte and Avenida 15 Norte (two blocks north of Avenida Juárez), offers snorkel tours around Playa and Cozumel, swimming with whale sharks from June to September and dive excursions to Dos Ojos, Calavera, El Eden and Gran cenotes. One-day basic scuba diving instruction (the "resort course") as well as a 3-day open water PADI course with knowledgeable instructors is available. Phone (984) 803-2403.

Cruise ship passengers and day visitors from Cancún take advantage of the Hard Rock Golf Club Riviera Maya, off Paseo Xaman-Ha in the Playacar hotel zone. This 18hole course, designed by Robert Von Hagge, has a challenging layout of narrow fairways and small greens surrounded by lush, well-maintained vegetation. There's a clubhouse, pro shop and spa on the premises. If you're a guest at a resort affiliated with the club, greens fee drop significantly, food and beverages are included and roundtrip transportation is provided. For additional information and tee times phone (984) 873-4990.

The Greg Norman-designed 18-hole course at the Golf Club El Camaleón Mayakoba, on the grounds of the Fairmont Mayakoba resort hotel, is laid out along the Caribbean shore in a setting of mangroves and jungle. Here the golf carts are equipped with a satellite positioning system that tracks your game. For more information phone (984) 206-3088.

The Paul B. Dye-designed 18-hole course at the Iberostar Playa Paraiso Golf Club, off Mex. 307 Km 298 near the Iberostar Grand Paraiso Hotel, challenges golfers with deep bunkers and unconventional hazards. A round here is also a good value; the rate includes a cart, food and beverages. For more information phone 01 (800) 849-1047 (toll-free long distance within Mexico) Mon.-Fri. 9-8, Sat. 9-2.

Guests staying at resorts affiliated with certain golf clubs can take advantage of reduced greens fees and transportation connections. Check with the concierge where you're staying regarding course locations and guest privileges.

# Shopping and Nightlife

Shopping Central in Playa del Carmen is 5th Avenue. Numerous shops and souvenir stands along and just off this pedestrian thoroughfare sell T-shirts, jewelry, knickknacks, handmade pottery, New Age paraphernalia and a huge variety of handicrafts. You'll find everything from cheap trinkets to high-quality, expensive merchandise. While the avenue offers a laid-back atmosphere for browsing, some merchants are quite persistent in their attempts to entice potential customers; keep walking and don't stop if you're not really interested in buying.

A lucha libre mask is a very popular souvenir, and many shops have a selection of these colorful masks worn by Mexico's professional wrestlers. At La Sirena, on 5th Avenue at the corner of Calle 26, you can also purchase materials to make your own customized *lucha libre* mask. This shop carries a nice selection of items—tin-framed mirrors, shawls, Guadalupe Virgin figurines—from all over the country.

The Converse Store, on 5th Avenue just north of Calle 16, sells Chuck Taylor Converse high-tops hand-painted with colorful Mexican designs. These custom sneakers are created by kids who live in a community in the state of Oaxaca, and all sales directly benefit this grass-roots art project.

Jellyfish, on Calle 4 between 5th and 10th avenues, sells really cool handmade lamps fashioned from coconuts, pumpkins and gourds. These hanging lamps cast different shapes and colors on the wall depending on what type of light source is installed. Pachamama, in the Calle Corazón mall on 5th Avenue (between calles 14 and 16), has a great selection of quality Mexican folk art, including lots of Day of the Dead-inspired crafts.

Galería de Arte, on 5th Avenue between calles 6 and 8, encompasses a collection of galleries displaying paintings and other works by Mexican artists. Unlike at many of the souvenir shops, credit cards are accepted, and they will also carefully wrap and ship your purchases. Phone (984) 879-3389. Another high-quality gallery is the Riviera Art Gallery, on Calle 20 between 5th and 10th avenues. It deals in contemporary paintings, photographs, sculptures and prints of original works by both established and emerging artists from Mexico and other parts of the world.

Spend lots of money on stylish men's and women's clothing, scarves, handbags and accessories at Pineda Covalin, on Fifth Avenue between calles 26 and 28. This fashion boutique incorporates iconic Mexican cultural motifs into many of its designs. Velas Artesanales Candle Boutique, Avenida 1 Norte at Avenida Constituyentes (a

block east of Fifth Avenue), sells handmade candles that come in all shapes and sizes.

Experience one of Mexico's quintessential beverages at Casa Tequila, on 5th Avenue between calles 4 and 6. You can learn about the different types of tequila, such as blanco (silver), reposado (aged) and añejo (extra aged), and they'll let you sample before you purchase. The colonial-style building's exterior wall art is illuminated at night.

If you prefer mall-type shopping and chain retailers, Playa has a couple of choices. Paseo del Carmen, between 5th and 10th avenues (a block south of Avenida Juárez and a block west of the ferry pier), is an open-air mall with stores like Ultrafemme, American Apparel and the Harley Davidson Store, along with several franchise restaurants. Quinta Alegría, on Fifth Avenue just south of Avenida Constituyentes, has stateside chains like Nike, Victoria's Secret, Forever 21, American Eagle Outfitters and Starbucks.

The evening is when 5th Avenue really comes alive; people flock to restaurants and congregate at sidewalk cafés, the sound of reggae fills the air and a carnival-like atmosphere prevails. Calle 12 Norte is another nightlife hot spot; some of Playa's most popular dance clubs line

A locally popular watering hole is Bar Ranita, on Calle 10 between Fifth Avenue and Avenida 10 Norte (adjacent to the La Rana Cansada Hotel). Mingle with locals and expats at this friendly, laid-back bar with rustic Mexican décor and tables in a courtyard festooned with bougainvillea. There's often live music, too.

Mandala, Calle 12 and Avenida 1 Norte, is one of Plava's hippest dance clubs. Its three levels include a streetlevel bar and a rooftop terrace. The atmosphere is rather swanky and the décor decidedly plush. DJs spin everything from techno and hip-hop to house and old-school disco. The cover charge is \$10-\$20 (U.S.) and the dress code is casual (no swimsuits, though). There's also an open bar. Phone (984) 879-4189.

Like the Cancún original, the Playa del Carmen outpost of Coco Bongo, Av. 10 Norte #221 (at the corner of Calle 12), presents high-energy stage shows featuring Cirque du Soleil-style acrobats/dancers and pop icon impersonators. Other times there are live bands or DJs spinning loud rock. The steep cover charge includes an open bar; phone (984) 803-5939.

Kitxen (pronounced "kitchen"), on 5th Avenue just north of Calle 20, is a small place featuring live music—bands from all over Mexico and the Caribbean—almost every night. There's no kitchen on the premises, but you will be served complimentary popcorn with your drink of choice.

If you'd rather not stand in line and/or deal with crowds of exuberant clubbers, the PlayaCrawl tour does the work for you. This guided excursion visits three different spots, complete with VIP entry, seating in reserved areas and open bar or bottle service from 10 p.m. to 3 a.m. Tips and round-trip transportation to the meeting point are not included. The tour is offered nightly starting at 10:15. The cost is \$75 per person (minimum age 18). For additional information and to make reservations phone (888) 537-9797 (from the United States).

# Dining

An impressive number of restaurants offer a smorgasbord of variety. Mexican, American, Italian, German, seafood, steak, pizza and taco vendors, ice cream and popsicle stands—it's all here. If you want something healthy to nibble on while walking around town, stop at a fruit stand. For about 20 pesos, women wearing traditional Mayan blouses (white with colorful embroidery) will give you a large cup filled with chunks of fresh pineapple, mango, coconut and watermelon.

Churros, sold from street carts, are sticks of dough pressed through a tube shaped like a star, then fried in oil and rolled in cinnamon sugar or filled with fruit jam or melted chocolate. Another tasty on-the-go snack is tacos al pastor, shredded, marinated pork cooked on a rotisserie, heaped on a small corn tortilla and garnished with chopped onions, cilantro and a slice of pineapple.

For a sweet break stop at Ah Cacao Chocolate Café, on 5th Avenue at Calle 30. Sit at one of the little sidewalk tables, linger over an iced coffee or a mocha flavored with Mexican cacao and indulge in one of their signature brownies—or try the Chocolate Maya, a dairy-free concoction of cacao and spices. There's also free Wi-Fi, although the connection can be slow if the place is crowded. Another branch is on Avenida Constituyentes at 5th Avenue.

Although 5th Avenue is lined with restaurants, don't let that limit your culinary exploring. Babe's Noodles & Bar, on Calle 10 between 5th and 10th avenues, is an international smorgasbord—Swedish owned, a menu emphasizing Thai and Vietnamese dishes, décor that features Barbie dolls, lava lamps and Hollywood pin-ups. Order an appetizer of spring rolls filled with crunchy veggies, served with peanut sauce, and Thai-style noodles in green or coconut curry—or perhaps Swedish meatballs in a cream gravy. Eat in the Buddha Garden, an open-air terrace surrounded by tropical trees and hung with Asian lanterns.

A bit off the beaten tourist path is La Pesca, on 30th Avenue between Calle 16 and Avenida Constituyentes (look for the thatched *palapa* roof). Some locals say it serves the best seafood in town. Sip a mango margarita while deciding how you want your whole fish prepared (your server will present the catches of the day). Other menu

standbys are the ceviches, octopus (pulpo) in a spicy sauce and cazuela de camarones (shrimp casserole). If you're not in the mood for seafood, order fajitas.

Playa is pretty casual, and you won't need to dress up even at the more expensive places in town. Tailored resort wear is appropriate for dinner at fine-dining establishments in the luxury resorts. There's no need to watch what you order at restaurants that target the tourist trade. Use your own judgment regarding local hangouts or street food, but as a general rule if it's cooked it should be safe to eat. See the Lodgings & Restaurants section for AAA Diamond designated dining establishments.

RANCHO PUNTA VENADO is at Mex. 307 Km marker 278 (on the e. side of the highway), s. of Xcaret and about a 10-minute drive s. of Playa del Carmen. This large, rustic working ranch is also a tourist-oriented eco-park with more than 2 miles of uninterrupted coastline. The main activity is a guided horseback riding excursion through tropical scrub jungle and along a stretch of unspoiled beach. If you have riding experience be sure to mention it; you'll go with a different guide on a spirited horse and have more of an adventure.

Other activities include Waverunner and jet-ski rides, ATV rides through a jungle habitat, a walk through a cavern system followed by an ATV ride to a cenote for swimming, and snorkeling at a nearby protected reef. And if you just feel like kicking back on a chaise lounge shaded by a palapa, there's also a beach club on the premises.

Fees are discounted if tickets are booked online. Age and weight restrictions apply for some activities. Time: Allow 4 hours minimum. **Phone:** (984) 242-0073, or (877) 849-6490 (from U.S. and Canada). **GT** 

RIO SECRETO is about 5 km (3 mi.) s. of Playa del Carmen and just s. of Xcaret, at Mex. 307 Km marker 282 (on the w. side of the highway; watch for the Rio Secreto sign). At this nature preserve an underground river flows through a cave system that is millions of years old but was only discovered in 2006 by a local rancher. The eerily silent environment is highlighted by otherworldly stalactite and stalagmite formations. Guided excursions led by a knowledgeable, bilingual guide explore the 2,000-footlong route, allowing visitors to float in a small pool, experience pitch blackness for a moment and observe shrimp, bats and other creatures that have adapted to the very specialized environment.

Note: There is a long, bumpy, 30-minute ride in a 10passenger van from the reception area to the cavern entrance. After showering and changing into a wet suit, life vest, waterproof shoes and a light-equipped helmet, guests are escorted down a jungle trail that leads to the cave opening. The trek through the caves proceeds in single file,

with each person holding on to the wet suit strap of the person in front. Some climbing up and down narrow, rocky trails is required. Guests must be able to walk without assistance, weigh less than 250 pounds and be free of physical limitations. Use of a personal camera is permitted outside but not within the cavern. Under 4 are not permitted.

**Time:** Allow 4 hours minimum. **Phone:** (984) 147-6050, (888) 275-6087 (from the United States and Canada), or 01 (800) 681-6713 (toll-free long distance within Mexico). 

XCARET is about 6 km (4 mi.) s. of Playa del Carmen at Mex. 307 Km marker 282 (follow the marked turn-off). At Xcaret (ISH-kah-ret), preserving the natural environment is as important as showcasing it, and equally important is this water park's dedication to educating visitors regarding Mayan history, culture and traditions.

One of the most popular activities for swimmers, snorkelers and divers is paddling through interconnected cenotes (freshwater sinkholes) and two natural underground rivers. There also are beaches and inlets for swimming and snorkeling, along with educational programs that include interaction and swimming with dolphins. For a more adventurous outing board Adrenalina, a boat that zips over the open Caribbean while making high-speed twists and turns. Snuba (a combination of scuba diving and snorkeling) and Sea Trek (an underwater helmet) activities allow visitors to view marine life around an offshore coral reef.

In addition to water-based recreation, Xcaret offers a living coral reef aquarium; jaguar, deer and monkey island habitats; an aviary; a bat cave; regional wildlife exhibits, including tapirs, flamingos, manatees and sea turtles; a nature trail through tropical jungle; a bromeliad and orchid greenhouse; and a Butterfly Pavilion. Several small archeological sites are on the grounds.

A replica of a Mayan village (Pueblo Maya) depicts how life is still lived in many rural Yucatán towns. The recreated village cemetery, with colorful grave displays and catacombs running underneath, has a hilltop setting. Entertainment features performances of the ceremonial flying pole dance by the Papantla Flyers and the rousing evening show "Xcaret Mexico Espectacular," with traditional music and dance performances and an overview of Mexican history as seen through the eyes of a young girl.

Note: Using suntan lotion is not permitted in the lagoons and other waterways because of its effect on the marine habitat. Visitors are not permitted to bring food, beverages, audio devices or sunblock lotions into the park. Allow a full day.

**Phone:** (998) 883-3143 in Cancún, (984) 206-0038 in Playa del Carmen, or (855) 326-0682 (toll-free from the United States and Canada).

XPLOR is 7 km (4 mi.) s. on Mex. 307 to Km marker 282; take the exit signed "Xplor/Xcaret" marker 282; take the exit signed "Xplor/Xcaret" and follow signs. This eco-adventure park caters to families with a variety of safe, well-organized outdoor activities. Two zipline circuits have a total of 14 lines and towers of varying heights up to 147 feet, along with a waterslide plunge. A 6.2-mile-long ATV trail runs through the jungle as well as a couple of underground tunnels.

Visitors can steer a hand paddle raft along an underground river and cave system and through a grotto with clear, cool water and amazing rock formations. Hammock Splash is a mini zipline featuring a hammock chair instead of a harness and ends with a cooling dunk in a cenote. You can also drive an amphibious vehicle along junglelined trails, across a suspended bridge and through a subterranean cavern.

The all-inclusive experience includes a buffet lunch with unlimited nonalcoholic beverages, and there are smoothie and snack stations in the park. Helmets, safety equipment and lockers are provided; water-resistant shoes can be purchased at park shops. Bring towels, a bathing suit, an extra pair of shorts, appropriate footwear and a waterproof camera.

Note: Arrive early, as lines at the entrance can be long and slow, and put the ziplines first on your agenda, since they're the most popular activity and lines can again be long. Some zipline towers require quite a bit of climbing. The ATV trails are dusty during the dry season (roughly November through May). Children under 6 are not permitted to participate in the Hammock Splash activity. Ages 0-4 are not permitted in the park. Those with certain health conditions should heed posted warnings.

Time: Allow 5 hours minimum. Phone: (998) 883-3143 from Cancun, (984) 206-0038 from Playa del Carmen, or (855) 326-0682 (toll-free from the United States and Canada). 🚻 🔀



ALOFT PLAYA DEL CARMEN BOOK NOW 984/147-6565



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SAVE Hotel. Address: Calle 34 Nte Manzana 100 Lote 3 77710.



ANDAZ MAYAKOBA BOOK NOW 984/149-1234





AAA Benefit: Members save up to 10% and earn World of Hyatt A  $\mathbb{N}$   $\mathcal{A}$  A  $\mathbb{Z}$  points when booking AAA/CAA rates!

Resort Hotel. Address: Carretera Federal Cancun 77710. Location: Oceanfront. Facility: Nestled among the mangroves and waterways, this stylish beachfront hotel offers the perfect getaway. Enjoy the sleek guest rooms and the countless outdoor activities. Meets AAA guest room security requirements. 214 units, some two bedrooms. 2-3 stories (no elevator), exterior corridors. Parking: on-site (fee) and valet. Amenities: safes. Dining: 4 restaurants. Pool: outdoor. Activities: hot tub, beach on-site, cabanas, self-propelled boats, scuba diving, snorkeling, regulation golf, tennis, recreation programs, kids club, bicycles, trails, health club, spa. Guest Services: valet laundry, area transportation. (See ad p. 133.)

































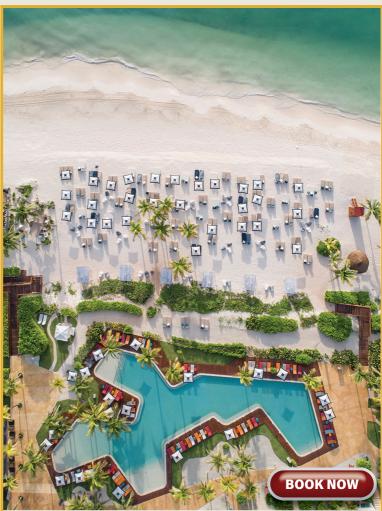


# Arrive as a tourist, leave as a local

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# BANYAN TREE MAYAKOBA BOOK NOW 984/877-3688





Resort Hotel. Address: Carr Federal Chetumal-Puerto Juárez KM 298 77710. Location: Oceanfront. Facility: The unique mixture of Asian and Mexican architecture is stunning throughout. The gated resort blends untouched nature in a carefully maintained ecosystem. Every room features a private plunge pool. Meets AAA quest room security requirements. 173 units, some two bedrooms, three bedrooms and efficiencies. 1-2 stories (no elevator), interior/exterior corridors. Bath: shower only. Parking: valet only. Amenities: safes. Dining: 2 restaurants, also, Saffron, see separate listing, entertainment. Pool: heated outdoor. Activities: sauna, hot tub, steamroom, beach on-site, cabanas, self-propelled boats, scuba diving, snorkeling, regulation golf, tennis, recreation programs, kids club, bicycles, lawn sports, trails, health club, spa. Guest Services: valet laundry, area transportation.





























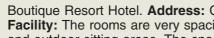




# BLUE DIAMOND LUXURY BOUTIQUE HOTEL BOOK NOW 984/206-4100







Boutique Resort Hotel. Address: Carr Chetumal KM 298 77710. Location: Oceanfront. Facility: The rooms are very spacious, offering an abundance of seating, walk-in closets and outdoor sitting areas. The spa area features a unique Mayan Temazcal or sauna for quests to experience. Meets AAA quest room security requirements. 128 units, some three bedrooms and kitchens. 1 story, exterior corridors. Bath: shower only. Parking: on-site and valet. Terms: age restrictions may apply. Amenities: safes. Dining: 3 restaurants. Pool: outdoor. Activities: sauna, hot tub, steamroom, beach on-site, cabanas, self-propelled boats, scuba diving, snorkeling, recreation programs, bicycles, trails, exercise room, spa. Guest Services: valet laundry.





































# CATALONIA PLAYA MAROMA BOOK NOW 984/877-3300



Resort Hotel. Address: Carretera Fed 307 Chetumal-Puerto Juarez. Location: Oceanfront. Facility: This all inclusive resort offers a stunning beach and a huge pool area facing the ocean. Ideal family friendly resort with a an assortment of recreational activities and a variety of room types. 424 units. 3 stories (no elevator), exterior corridors. Amenities: safes. Dining: 7 restaurants, entertainment. Pool: outdoor. Activities: sauna, hot tub, steamroom, beach on-site, self-propelled boats, scuba diving, snorkeling, tennis, recreation programs, kids club, playground, game room, exercise room, spa. Guest Services: valet laundry.





























EL DORADO CASITAS ROYALE, A SPA RESORT

BOOK NOW

998/872-8030

Resort Hotel. Address: Carr Cancun-Tulum KM 45 77710.

FOUR DIAMOND INSPECTED @ CLEAN

EL DORADO MAROMA A BEACHFRONT RESORT BOOK NOW 984/206-3470



Resort Hotel. Address: Carr Cancun-Tulum KM 553 77710. Location: Oceanfront. Facility: Tranquil and low-key are adjectives that best describe the atmosphere at this intimate all-inclusive resort. Room types include swim-up units, master suites or the original quest rooms in Mi Hotelito. Meets AAA quest room security requirements. 162 units, some two bedrooms, efficiencies and kitchens. 2-4 stories (no elevator), interior/ exterior corridors. Bath: shower only. Parking: valet only. Terms: age restrictions may apply. Amenities: safes. Dining: 3 restaurants, nightclub, entertainment. Pool: outdoor. Activities: sauna, steamroom, beach on-site, cabanas, self-propelled boats, scuba diving, snorkeling, recreation programs, lawn sports, exercise room, spa. Guest Services: valet laundry, area transportation. (See ad on insert, starting on p. 136.)





























<sup>7</sup> EL DORADO ROYALE, A SPA RESORT **BOOK NOW** 998/872-8030

Resort Hotel. Address: Carr Federal Cancun-Tulum KM 45 77710. (See ad on insert, starting on p. 136.)

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FAIRMONT MAYAKOBA BOOK NOW 984/206-3000



Resort Hotel. Address: Carr Federal KM 298 77710. Location: Oceanfront. Facility: The expansive grounds house many pools, gardens and casitas. Some suites have a private infinity plunge pool. Children have fun learning about Mayan culture and nature in the kid's club. Meets AAA quest room security requirements. 401 units, some two bedrooms. 2-4 stories (no elevator), interior/exterior corridors. Parking: valet only. Amenities: safes. Dining: 4 restaurants, entertainment. Pool: outdoor, heated outdoor. Activities: sauna, hot tub, steamroom, beach on-site, cabanas, self-propelled boats, scuba diving, snorkeling, regulation golf, tennis, recreation programs, kids club, bicycles, game room, lawn sports, trails, health club, spa. **Guest Services:** valet laundry, area transportation. (See ad starting on p. 140.)



























# THE FIVES BEACH HOTEL AND RESIDENCES BOOK NOW 984/877-2750



INSPECTED @ CLEAN

Resort Hotel. Address: Fracc El Limonar, Xcalacoco 77710. Location: Oceanfront. Facility: This large resort caters to families and offers a variety of room types, including swim-up units. Some facilities include multiple pools, a kids club, a large exercise facility, spa and a gin bar. Meets AAA guest room security requirements. 671 units, some kitchens. 3-4 stories. interior/exterior corridors. Parking: valet only. Amenities: safes. Dining: 8 restaurants, entertainment. Pool: outdoor, heated outdoor. Activities: hot tub, beach on-site, cabanas, self-propelled boats, scuba diving, snorkeling, tennis, recreation programs, kids club, playground, game room, lawn sports, exercise room, spa. Guest **Services:** valet laundry.





























# THE FIVES DOWNTOWN HOTEL & RESIDENCES, CURIO COLLECTION BY

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984/206-5500





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Hotel. Address: Avenida 10 Nte & Calle 2 Nte 77710. Facility: Check out the large cenote in the middle of the lobby which merges the upscale décor with Mother Nature. Wear your flip flops to the roof-top infinity pool and be impressed by stunning views. Meets AAA quest room security requirements. 133 units, some two bedrooms, efficiencies and kitchens, 4 stories, interior corridors, Parking; valet and street only. Amenities: safes. Dining: 3 restaurants. Pool: outdoor. Activities: sauna, hot tub, steamroom, exercise room, spa. Guest Services: valet laundry.































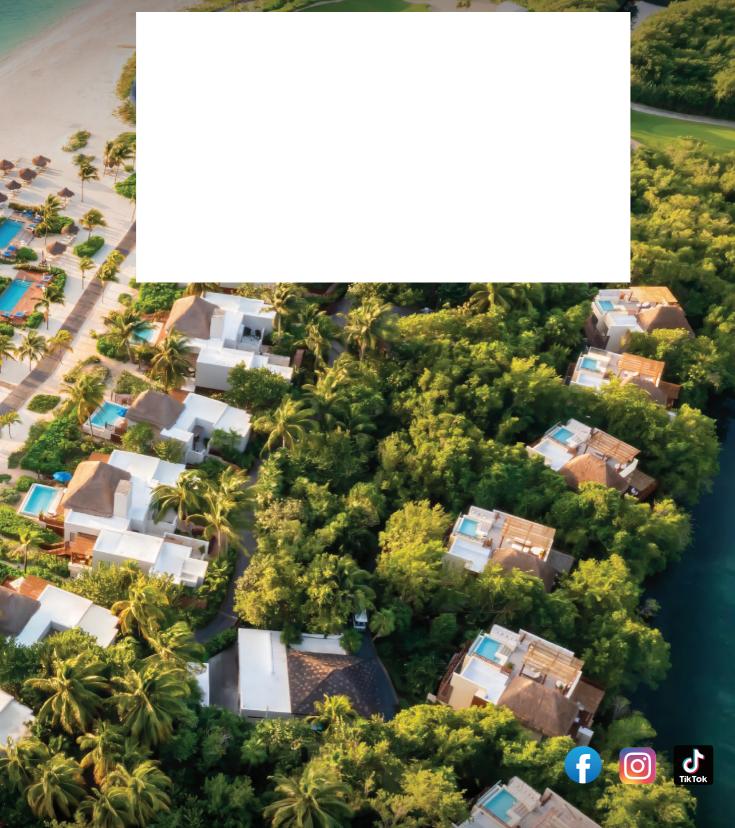
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GENERATIONS RIVIERA MAYA BOOK NOW 998/872-8030



Contemporary Resort Hotel. Address: Carr Cancun-Tulum KM 45 77710. (See ad on insert, starting on p. 136.)



# THE GRAND BLISS RIVIERA MAYA BOOK NOW 984/206-4000



Resort Hotel. Address: KM 48 Carr Fed Cancun-Playa del Car 77710. Location: Oceanfront. Facility: This complex, on 218 acres, has several theme restaurants including Cuban, Asian and Italian. Some rooms offer kitchens and balcony pools - these guests have access to the exclusive beach club pool. Meets AAA guest room security requirements. 191 units, some efficiencies. 3 stories, interior/exterior corridors. Parking: valet only. Amenities: safes. Dining: 28 restaurants, entertainment. Pool: outdoor. Activities: sauna, hot tub, steamroom, beach on-site, self-propelled boats, snorkeling, regulation golf, par 3 golf, tennis, recreation programs, kids club, lawn sports, trails, health club, spa. **Guest Services:** valet and coin laundry, area transportation.



























# GRAND HYATT PLAYA DEL CARMEN RESORT BOOK NOW 984/875-1234



FOUR DIAMOND INSPECTED @ CLEAN

GRAND HYATT AAA Benefit: Members save up to 10% and earn World of Hyatt points when booking AAA/CAA rates!

Hotel, Address: Esg 1st Ave and Calle 26 77710, Location: Oceanfront, Facility: The architectural design of this property is unique and impressive, from the waterfall pyramid to the terraced-style building. If you enjoy privacy, ask for a room with its own private plunge pool. Meets AAA quest room security requirements. 314 units. 4 stories, interior/ exterior corridors. Parking: on-site (fee) and valet. Amenities: safes. Dining: 3 restaurants, entertainment. Pool: heated outdoor. Activities: sauna, hot tub, steamroom, beach on-site, cabanas, self-propelled boats, recreation programs, kids club, bicycles, game room, exercise room, spa. Guest Services: valet laundry.

























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# GRAND LUXXE AT VIDANTA RIVIERA MAYA BOOK NOW

984/206-4032



**FIVE DIAMOND** 

INSPECTED @ CLEAN

Resort Hotel, Address: KM 48 Carretera Federal Cancun 77710, Location: Oceanfront, Facility: This resort is enveloped by nature but with facilities that reflect the ultimate in luxury. Guests are seamlessly pampered from the moment they arrive and provided with a highly personalized stay. Meets AAA guest room security requirements. 196 units, some two bedrooms, three bedrooms, kitchens and condominiums. 2-3 stories, interior/exterior corridors. Parking: valet only. Amenities: safes. Dining: 28 restaurants, entertainment. Pool: outdoor, heated outdoor. Activities: sauna, hot tub, steamroom, beach on-site, cabanas, self-propelled boats, scuba diving, snorkeling, par 3 golf, tennis, recreation programs, kids club, lawn sports, trails, health club, spa. Guest Services: valet and coin laundry, rental car service, luggage security pick-up, area transportation.

(See ad on insert, starting on p. 144.)



























# THE GRAND MAYAN RIVIERA MAYA BOOK NOW 984/206-4000





INSPECTED @ CLEAN

Resort Hotel. Address: KM 48 Carr Federal Cancun-Playa del Carmen 77710. Location: Oceanfront. Facility: The rooms are very spacious with ample seating and outdoor balconies that offer exceptional views. The property is vast, with many fun shows, activities and theme restaurants for quests to enjoy. Meets AAA quest room security requirements. 712 units. 3 stories, interior corridors. Parking: on-site and valet. Amenities: safes. Dining: 28 restaurants, entertainment. Pool: outdoor. Activities: sauna, hot tub, steamroom, beach on-site, cabanas, self-propelled boats, scuba diving, snorkeling, regulation golf, par 3 golf, tennis, recreation programs, kids club, lawn sports, trails, health club, spa. **Guest Services:** valet and coin laundry, area transportation.

































# GRAND VELAS RIVIERA MAYA BOOK NOW 984/877-4400



Resort Hotel. Address: Carr Cancun-Tulum KM 62 77710. Location: Oceanfront. Facility: Situated on the sugar-white sands of the Riviera Maya, this world class all-inclusive resort offers oversize guest units with exceptional comfort and numerous amenities. Meets AAA quest room security requirements. 539 units, some two bedrooms. 2-4 stories, interior/exterior corridors. Bath: shower only. Parking: valet only. Amenities: safes. Dining: 7 restaurants, also, Cocina de Autor, Frida, Lucca, Piaf, Sen Lin, see separate listings, nightclub, entertainment. Pool: heated outdoor. Activities: sauna, hot tub, steamroom, beach on-site, cabanas, motor boats, self-propelled boats, scuba diving, snorkeling, recreation programs, kids club, bicycles, playground, game room, lawn sports, trails, health club, spa. Guest Services: valet laundry, area transportation.





















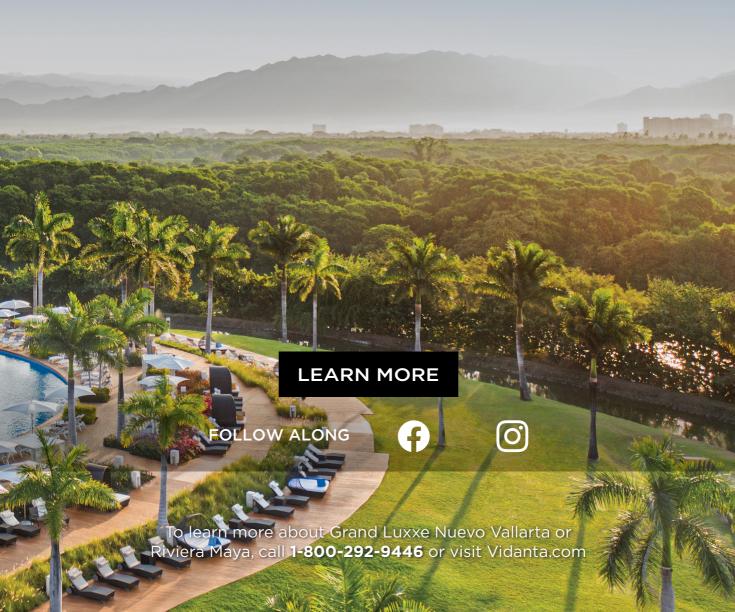


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## HILTON PLAYA DEL CARMEN RESORT BOOK NOW 984/877-2900







Resort Hotel. Address: Constituyentes No 2 77710. Location: Oceanfront. Facility: This all-inclusive, adults-only resort has multiple swimming pools and restaurants as well as an array of on-site activities. Guest rooms are

well appointed and loaded with amenities. Meets AAA guest room security requirements. 524 units. 3-4 stories, exterior corridors. Parking: on-site and valet. Terms: age restrictions may apply. Amenities: safes. Dining: 3 restaurants, entertainment. Pool: outdoor, heated outdoor. Activities: hot tub, beach on-site, cabanas, tennis, recreation programs, exercise room, spa. Guest Services: valet laundry.



























## HOTEL XCARET ARTE BOOK NOW 984/257-7200



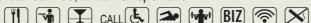
Resort Hotel. Address: Carretera Federal Chetumal KM 282 77710. Location: Oceanfront. Facility: This all-inclusive, adults only luxury hotel features an endless amount of fun activities. There are many fine dining restaurants with tasting menus, shopping venues and stunning room accommodations. 900 units. 6 stories, interior corridors. Parking: on-site and valet. Terms: age restrictions may apply. Amenities: safes. Dining: 11 restaurants, nightclub, entertainment. Pool: heated outdoor. Activities: sauna, hot tub, steamroom, beach on-site, cabanas, self-propelled boats, tennis, recreation programs, bicycles, trails, health club, spa. Guest Services: valet laundry, rental car service, area transportation.





























# HOTEL XCARET MEXICO BOOK NOW 984/159-1600





Resort Hotel. Address: Carretera Federal Chetumal KM 282 77710. Location: Oceanfront. Facility: This all-inclusive resort is packed with activities, including eight theme parks, many pools, three exercise rooms, and a private island. Many of the modern rooms open up to pools or the river. 900 units, some two bedrooms, three bedrooms and kitchens. 4-6 stories, interior/exterior corridors. Parking: on-site and valet. Amenities: safes. Dining: 12 restaurants, also, Ha', see separate listing, nightclub, entertainment. Pool: heated outdoor. Activities: sauna, hot tub, steamroom, beach on-site, self-propelled boats, tennis, recreation programs, kids club, bicycles, playground, game room, trails, health club, spa. Guest Services: valet and coin laundry, rental car service, area transportation.





























# IBEROSTAR SELECTION PARAISO LINDO

BOOK NOW 984/877-2800



Resort Hotel, Address: Carr Chetumal PTO Juárez KM 309 77710. Location: Oceanfront. Facility: This all-inclusive hotel in Playa Paraiso's large Iberostar resort complex features traditional Mexican décor and plenty of fun activities for the entire family. Most guest rooms are spacious. Meets AAA guest room security requirements. 448 units. 3 stories (no elevator), exterior corridors. Amenities: safes. Dining: 10 restaurants, nightclub, entertainment. Pool: outdoor. Activities: sauna, hot tub, steamroom, beach on-site, motor boats, self-propelled boats, scuba diving, snorkeling, regulation golf, tennis, recreation programs, kids club, bicycles, playground, lawn sports, health club, spa. Guest **Services:** valet laundry, area transportation.

























# IBEROSTAR SELECTION PARAISO MAYA BOOK NOW 984/877-2800



Resort Hotel. Address: Carr Chetumal PTO Juárez KM 309 77710. Location: Oceanfront. Facility: This all-inclusive hotel in Playa Paraiso's large Iberostar resort complex features upscale, Mayan-influenced décor and plenty of fun activities for the entire family. There are nine room categories. Meets AAA guest room security requirements. 434 units. 3 stories, exterior corridors. Parking: on-site and valet. Amenities: safes. Dining: 10 restaurants, nightclub, entertainment. Pool: outdoor. Activities: sauna, hot tub, steamroom, beach on-site, motor boats, self-propelled boats, scuba diving, snorkeling, regulation golf, tennis, recreation programs, kids club, bicycles, playground, lawn sports, health club, spa. Guest Services: valet laundry, area transportation.





























IBEROSTAR WAVES PARAISO BEACH BOOK NOW 984/877-2800



Resort Hotel. Address: Carr Chetumal PTO Juárez KM 309 77710.



IBEROSTAR WAVES PARAISO DEL MAR BOOK NOW 984/877-2800



Resort Hotel. Address: Carr Chetumal PTO Juárez KM 309 77710.



IBEROSTAR WAVES QUETZAL BOOK NOW 984/877-2000

THREE DIAMOND INSPECTED @ CLEAN Resort Hotel. Address: Av Xaman-Ha Lote Hotelero 2 Playacar 77710.



IBEROSTAR WAVES TUCAN BOOK NOW 984/877-2000



Resort Hotel. Address: Av Xaman-Ha Lote Hotelero 2 Playacar 77710.



## IMPRESSION MOXCHE BY SECRETS BOOK NOW 984/122-4750





### AAA Benefit: Members save up to 10% and earn World of Hyatt points when booking AAA/CAA rates!

Resort Hotel. Address: Carr Fed 307 KM 297. Location: Oceanfront. Facility: This stunning property boasts spectacular features throughout. Spacious guest rooms offer custom furnishings, luxurious bedding and ample seating. Gorgeous bathrooms feature 1st class amenities. Meets AAA guest room security requirements. 198 units, some two bedrooms. 8 stories, interior corridors. Parking: on-site and valet. Terms: age restrictions may apply. Amenities: safes. Dining: 15 restaurants, nightclub, entertainment. Pool: heated outdoor. Activities: sauna, hot tub, steamroom, beach on-site, cabanas, self-propelled boats, fishing, scuba diving, snorkeling, recreation programs, bicycles, trails, exercise room, spa. Guest Services: valet laundry, rental car service. Affiliated with Impression by Secrets.























# JOIA PARAISO BY IBEROSTAR BOOK NOW 984/877-2800



[fyi] Resort Hotel. Under major renovation, call for details. Last Designation: Four Diamond. Address: Carr Chetumn PTO Juárez KM 309 77710. Location: Oceanfront. Facility: This flagship adults-only Iberostar hotel in the Playa Paraiso complex features common areas with an ornate Italian-European theme and a bountiful supply of all-inclusive amenities and activities. Meets AAA quest room security requirements. 310 units. 3 stories, interior/exterior corridors. Parking: on-site and valet. Terms: age restrictions may apply. Amenities: safes. Dining: 5 restaurants, nightclub, entertainment. Pool: outdoor, heated indoor. Activities: sauna, hot tub, steamroom, beach on-site, cabanas, motor boats, self-propelled boats, scuba diving, snorkeling, regulation golf, tennis, recreation programs, bicycles, game room, lawn sports, exercise room, spa. Guest **Services:** valet laundry, rental car service, area transportation.























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LA CASA DE LA PLAYA BY XCARET BOOK NOW 984/257-1350



Boutique Resort Hotel. Address: Carr Federal Chetumal KM 282 77710. Location: Oceanfront. Facility: The rooms offer luxuriously soft bedding, a patio with plunge pool, a unique stone soaker tub and live jellyfish aguariums. The spa is definitely a great option after a fun day at any of the parks. 63 units. 3-5 stories, exterior corridors. Parking: valet only. Terms: age restrictions may apply. Amenities: safes. Dining: 2 restaurants, entertainment. Pool: heated outdoor. Activities: beach on-site, bicycles, trails, health club, spa. Guest Services: valet laundry, area transportation.

























NICKELODEON HOTELS & RESORTS RIVIERA MAYA BOOK NOW

984/689-0600



Resort Hotel. Address: Carr Cancun-Tulum KM 45 77710. Location: Oceanfront. Facility: The rooms at this themed resort are very spacious with ample seating, two bathrooms and private balconies with exceptional views. The outdoor water park area in simply amazing, offering fun for all! Meets AAA guest room security requirements. 280 units, some two bedrooms. 6 stories, interior corridors. Parking: on-site and valet. Amenities: safes. Dining: 7 restaurants, nightclub, entertainment. Pool: outdoor. Activities: sauna, hot tub, steamroom, beach on-site, cabanas, self-propelled boats, fishing, scuba diving, snorkeling, recreation programs, kids club, playground, game room, trails, exercise room, spa. Guest Services: valet laundry, rental car service, luggage security pick-up, area transportation. (See ad on insert, starting on p. 136.)

























PARADISUS LA PERLA - ADULTS ONLY - RIVIERA MAYA BOOK NOW 984/877-3900

Resort Hotel. Address: Quinta Avenida, Mazana 569 77710.

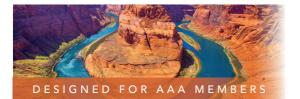


PARADISUS PLAYA DEL CARMEN - RIVIERA MAYA BOOK NOW 984/877-3900

Resort Hotel. Address: Quinta Avenida, Mazana 569, Lote 1 77710.

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# PLAYACAR PALACE

BOOK NOW 984/873-4960



Resort Hotel. Address: Fracc Playacar phase 1, Bahiadel del Esp Santo 77710. Location: Oceanfront. Facility: This all-inclusive resort, with numerous recreational opportunities and several dining venues, features rooms that offer a relaxing hot tub and come with a complimentary bottle of wine. Meets AAA guest room security requirements. 198 units. 5 stories, exterior corridors. Parking: on-site and valet. Amenities: safes. Dining: 5 restaurants, entertainment. Pool: heated outdoor. Activities: sauna, hot tub, steamroom, beach on-site, recreation programs, kids club, bicycles, playground, lawn sports, exercise room, spa. Guest Services: valet laundry. (See ad starting on p. 152.)























RESIDENCE INN BY MARRIOTT PLAYA DEL CARMEN

**BOOK NOW** 

984/689-0900



AAA Benefit: Members save 5% or more and earn Marriott Bonvoy™ points when booking AAA/CAA rates!

SAVE Extended Stay Hotel. Address: Retorno 50, Ave Sur Carretera 307.



RIU PALACE RIVIERA MAYA BOOK NOW

984/877-2280



Resort Hotel. Address: Ave Xaman-Ha, Mz 9 y 10 77710.



ROSEWOOD MAYAKOBA BOOK NOW 984/875-8000



Resort Hotel. Address: Carr Federal KM 298, Solidaridad 77710.



# ROYAL HIDEAWAY PLAYACAR BOOK NOW 984/873-4500



Resort Hotel. Address: Lote Hotelera No 6 Fracc Playacar 77710. Location: Oceanfront. Facility: Located in a high-end residential area, this adults only, all-inclusive resort offers upscale rooms, full concierge service, elegant dining and an abundance of activities indoors and beach-side. Meets AAA guest room security requirements. 201 units. 2-3 stories (no elevator), exterior corridors. Parking: on-site and valet. Terms: age restrictions may apply. Amenities: safes. Dining: 5 restaurants, entertainment. Pool: outdoor. Activities: sauna, hot tub, steamroom, beach on-site, cabanas, self-propelled boats, scuba diving, snorkeling, tennis, recreation programs, bicycles, game room, lawn sports,

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exercise room, spa. Guest Services: valet laundry.







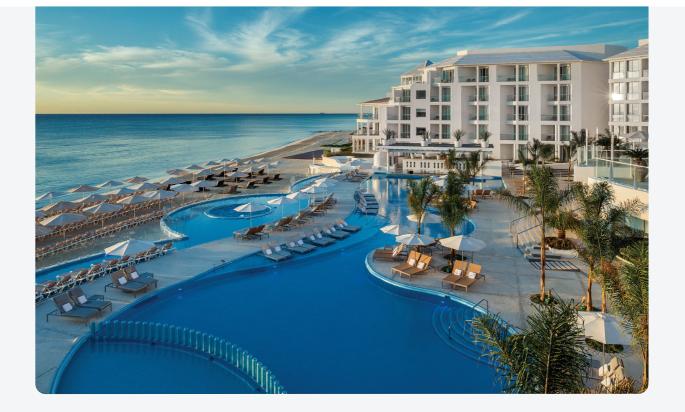












# OCEAN FRONT LUXURY IN THE HEART OF PLAYA



### The Pinnacle of Laid-Back Elegance

Nestled alongside the glistening turquoise shores of Playa del Carmen, and steps away from Mexico's version of 5th Avenue, the family-friendly **Playacar Palace** boasts a minimalistic charm and serene ambiance. Unwind and savor the sights, sounds, and tastes of this elegant resort, where adventure and relaxation await.

### **Unlock The Door To Serenity**

Pick up your key (or wristband) to a stately suite replete with a whirlpool tub, in-room liquor dispenser, and other lavish amenities. Take in the luscious view, kick back, and leave the world behind in your own Mexican Caribbean paradise.

### The Best Of Playacar

**Playacar Palace** features a seamless blend of modern technology with a chic boutique atmosphere. Along with luxury amenities like multiple pools, gourmet restaurants, and our luxurious spa, the resort is steps away from the famed Quinta Avenida, a bustling strip of high-end boutiques, restaurants, and bars. It's the perfect destination for families, groups, or a romantic rendezvous.

### Sip & Smile

When it's time to lift your glass, you'll find plenty of options. Sip unlimited cocktails, fine wines & beer at our sophisticated Lobby Bar. Pair your favorite bevy with savory snacks & sweet treats overlooking the sea at Aqua Bar. Or stay right where you are and order from the Swim Up Bar.

### **Gourmet Flavors**

We're certain you'll be hungry after sampling the delights of Playacar Palace. Savor masterfully prepared dishes from all around the world in vibrant settings: the flavors of Latin America at **Madremia**; delectable Pan-Asian dining at **Momo**; classic flavors of Italy at **Trattoria**, legendary traditions of the Yucatan at **Lahná**; wood-fired pizza at **Pizza del Mar** & more.

Plus, gourmet coffee, ice cream (now including vegan flavors) & hand-crafted chocolates and desserts at **Sweet & Coffee**.

### Always Something To Do

**Playacar Palace** creates fun-tastic opportunities for all ages. You may prefer to do nothing but lounge poolside. However, if you want to shake things up, we guarantee there isn't a better place to recharge your batteries than on our white-sand beach overlooking aquamarine waters. Take a day trip and "tee off" at the 27-hole Jack Nicklaus Signature golf course at sister property Moon Palace Cancun. Or experience the glorious Caribbean while paddleboarding or enjoying other water sports.

### The Three "Rs": Restore, Relax, Rejuvenate

Take a break from paradise to replenish your body's natural essence at our spa, with invigorating treatments and traditional healing techniques. Along with state-of-the-art facilities, you can choose from signature services, such as wood therapy massage, restorative facials & herbal rituals, as well as the healing power of hydrotherapy.

### For Kids & Teens

Our latest adventure is **The Dreamery**, a concept designed to ensure our youngest guests have the best vacation experience. Kids of all ages will have a blast, with games, activities & kid-friendly amenities. Plus, our youngest guests will love **The Playroom**.

### Wander. Explore. Indulge.

Take advantage of the fascinating wonders of Playa del Carmen, whether natural or man-made. Explore ancient Mayan ruins at Tulum or Chichen Itza, a UNESCO® World Heritage Site. Discover some of the best diving in the Caribbean, as well as underwater caverns. Go sailing or fishing. Or choose a more sophisticated shopping outing to Quinta Avenida.

Playacar Palace is our boutique family-friendly resort, part of The Palace Company, where you can experience the best of the stunning Riviera Maya.









THE ST. REGIS KANAI RESORT, RIVIERA MAYA





AAA Benefit: Members save 5% or more and earn Marriott Bonvoy™ points when booking AAA/CAA rates!

SAVE Resort Hotel. Address: Paseo Kanai 15.



# SECRETS MAROMA BEACH RIVIERA CANCUN BOOK NOW

984/877-3600





AAA Benefit: Members save up to 10% and earn World of Hyatt points when booking AAA/CAA rates!

Resort Hotel. Address: Carr Federal 307 Chetumal-Cancun KM 3065 77710. Location: Oceanfront. Facility: If you are looking to be

pampered in luxurious surroundings, then this oceanfront resort is for you. There are several room types to choose from including the preferred level with a balcony hot tub. Meets AAA guest room security requirements. 412 units. 3-4 stories, interior/exterior corridors. Parking: on-site and valet. Terms: age restrictions may apply. Amenities: safes. Dining: 7 restaurants, nightclub, entertainment. Pool: heated outdoor. Activities: sauna, hot tub, steamroom, beach on-site, self-propelled boats, scuba diving, snorkeling, miniature golf, tennis, recreation programs, bicycles, lawn sports, trails, exercise room, spa. Guest Services: valet laundry, rental car service, luggage security pick-up.



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SECRETS MOXCHE BOOK NOW 984/122-4700





AAA Benefit: Members save up to 10% and earn World of Hyatt points when booking AAA/CAA rates!

Resort Hotel. Address: Carretera Fed 307 KM 294. Location: Oceanfront. Facility: The property features an amazing lagoon with a

sandy beach and pools with over water hammocks to relax in. The rooms are spacious with ample seating, luxurious bedding and enormous upscale bathrooms. Meets AAA quest room security requirements. 485 units. 8 stories, interior corridors. Parking: on-site and valet. Terms: age restrictions may apply. Amenities: safes. Dining: 12 restaurants, nightclub, entertainment. Pool: heated outdoor. Activities: sauna, hot tub, steamroom, beach on-site, cabanas, self-propelled boats, fishing, scuba diving, snorkeling, recreation programs, bicycles, trails, health club, spa. Guest Services: valet laundry, rental car service.

# VICEROY RIVIERA MAYA, A LUXURY VILLA RESORT BOOK NOW 984/877-3000



Boutique Hotel. Address: Playa Xcalacoco Frac 7 77710. Location: Oceanfront. Facility: Ideal for a romantic getaway, this chic property features individual bungalows scattered about a jungle-like setting. Service is attentive, yet discreet. 41 units. 1 story, exterior corridors. Parking: valet only. Terms: age restrictions may apply. Amenities: safes. Pool: heated outdoor. Activities: hot tub, steamroom, beach on-site, self-propelled boats, scuba diving, snorkeling, recreation programs, exercise room, spa. Guest Services: valet 





WYNDHAM ALLTRA PLAYA DEL CARMEN ALL INCLUSIVE ADULTS ONLY

RESORT

**BOOK NOW** 984/873-4000



Resort Hotel. Address: Ave Constituyentes No 1 77710.

### WHERE TO EAT



AGAVE AZUL 984/875-8000



Asian Fine Dining. Address: Carr Federal KM 298, Solidaridad 77710.



### **COCINA DE AUTOR** 984/877-4400



New World Fine Dining. Expert Advice: Experience the multi-course, inspirational cuisine with a regularly changing menu. The artistic presentations and unique, scientific, "molecular" style cuisine creates a very emotional experience. The dapper staff impresses with deft service throughout the two- to three-hour event. Features: full bar. Reservations: required. Semiformal attire. Address: Carr Cancun-Tulum KM 62 77710.

Parking: valet only. D CALL



**ENCANTA** 984/257-7200

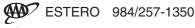


Spanish Fine Dining. Expert Advice: Located at the beautiful Xcaret Arte resort, this refined restaurant offers a fantastic dining experience incorporating Spanish and Mexican fusion. On the pre-set menu you will discover a variety of delectable dishes awaiting your taste buds. Consider upgrading to have the courses paired with locally sourced wines and tequilas to make your occasion extra special. Features: full bar. Reservations: required. Address: Carretera Federal Chetumal Km 282 L 77710. Parking: valet only.

(D) CALL( **&** )



### 56 THE CARIBBEAN COAST • PLAYA DEL CARMEN, YUCATÁN PENINSULA



FIVE DIAMOND

Peruvian Fine Dining. Address: Car Federal Chetumal-Puerto Juárez, KM 282 L23-2 77710.





Mexican Fine Dining. **Expert Advice:** Outstanding service, elegant décor and innovative cuisine by Chef Vega create a unique and memorable experience. The gourmet menu provides an excellent opportunity to sample the rich culinary heritage of Mexico. The mole de olla soup is one of the most creative soups you will ever find. To enjoy a multi-course culinary journey be sure to start with an appetizer such as the torta ahogada of duck carnitas or the scallops with crispy pork rind. Open days may vary depending on hotel occupancy. **Features:** full bar. **Reservations:** required. Semiformal attire. **Address:** Carr Cancun-Tulum KM 62 77710. **Parking:** valet only.





Mexican Fine Dining. **Expert Advice:** Discover yourself surrounded by flowing water as you enter the dining room. An ever-changing, contemporary, nine-course tasting menu, reflecting a variety of regional influences, can unashamedly paired with fine Mexican wines. While all the courses are beautifully presented, the liquid nitrogen dishes are amazing experiences. **Features:** full bar. **Reservations:** required. **Address:** Carretera Federal Chetumal KM 282 77710. **Parking:** valet only.

# ITZAM 984/122-4000



Mexican Fine Dining. Address: Paseo Kauai 16.

# **KIBI KIBI** 984/257-7200



Lebanese Fusion Fine Dining. **Expert Advice:** This restaurant offers a unique mix of Yucatecan and Lebanese fusion. On the menu, you will find an outstanding choice of options that delivers a tasty blend of both cuisines. Be sure not to miss the house specialty Kibi that can be ordered in several ways including a delicious stuffed cheese lobster. **Features:** full bar. **Reservations:** required. **Address:** Carretera Federal Chetumal Km 282 L 77710. **Parking:** valet only.



### **LUCCA** 984/877-4400



Italian Fine Dining. Expert Advice: This refined restaurant features a delicious blend of Italian and Mediterranean cuisines. On the menu, you will find a wide selection of offerings including seafood, pasta, pizza and risotto. Be sure to save room for one of the delectable desserts like panna cotta or tiramisu. Most evenings live music entertains the guests. Features: full bar. Reservations: required. Formal attire. Address: Carr Cancun Tulum KM 62 77710. Parking: valet only. D CALL



### PIAF 984/877-4400



French Fine Dining. Address: Carr Cancun-Tulum KM 62 77710.



SAFFRON 984/877-3688



Thai Fine Dining. Address: Carr Federal Chetumal-Puerto Juárez KM 298 77710.



### SEN LIN 984/877-4400



Asian Fine Dining. Expert Advice: This elegant restaurant provides a romantic setting for those couples looking for alone time. Gentle background music plays while you make your way through the delightful offerings presented by the Yucatan-born chef. The eclectic menu may feature items such as udon noodles with shrimp tempura, fried soft-shell crab with curry sauce and roasted duck. Service in this establishment doesn't miss a beat! Features: full bar. Reservations: required. Address: Carr Cancun-Tulum KM 62 77710. Parking: valet only.



TORO BY CHEF RICHARD SANDOVAL 984/122-4800



Latin American Fusion Fine Dining. Address: Paseo Kanai 15.



XAAK 984/257-7200



Mexican Fusion Fine Dining. Expert Advice: This refined restaurant offers the dishes of four renowned chefs in a very unique setting. On the tasting menu, you will discover culinary delights ranging from veal with manchamanteles to vanilla and coffee ravioli. Each plate delivers an incredible blend of flavors and textures. Consider upgrading to the premium wine and tequila tasting to make your experience extra special. Features: full bar. Reservations: required. Semiformal attire. Address: Carretera Federal Chetumal Km 282 L 77710. Parking: valet only. D CALL

### THE CARIBBEAN COAST • PLAYA DEL CARMEN — PUERTO AVENTURAS, YUCATÁN PENINSULA

CHINO POBLANO 984/257-7200

THREE DIAMOND INSPECTED & CLEAN

FOUR DIAMOND INSPECTED @ CLEAN

OUR DIAMOND

THREE DIAMOND INSPECTED @ CLEAN

**fyi** Not evaluated. **Address:** Carretera Federal Chetumal Km 282 L 77710.

### PUERTO AVENTURAS, QUINTANA ROO

BARCELO MAYA COLONIAL BOOK NOW 984/875-1500

Hotel. Address: Carr Chetumal - Puerto Juárez KM 2663 77750.

BARCELÓ MAYA PALACE BOOK NOW 984/875-1500

Resort Hotel. Address: Carr Chetumal-Puerto Juárez KM 2663 77734.

BARCELO MAYA RIVIERA BOOK NOW 984/875-1500

Resort Hotel. Address: Carretera Chetumal-Puerto Juárez KM 2663 77734. Location: Oceanfront. Facility: This adults only, all-inclusive resort features a sleek and modern design and many amenities. Guest rooms feature a minimalistic design in neutral tones. Every room has a balcony with jetted tub. Meets AAA guest room security requirements. 850 units. 5 stories, exterior corridors. Bath: shower only. Parking: valet only. Terms: age restrictions may apply. Amenities: safes. Dining: nightclub, entertainment. Pool: outdoor. Activities: sauna, hot tub, steamroom, beach on-site, motor boats, self-propelled boats, scuba diving, snorkeling, miniature golf, tennis, recreation programs, lawn sports, trails, health club, spa. Guest Services: valet laundry, rental car service, area transportation.

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BARCELO MAYA TROPICAL BOOK NOW 984/875-1500

Resort Hotel. Address: Carr Chetumal - Puerto Juárez KM 2663 77750.

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## DREAMS AVENTURAS RIVIERA MAYA

BOOK NOW 984/875-3000





# AAA Benefit: Members save up to 10% and earn World of Hyatt points when booking AAA/CAA rates!

Resort Hotel. Address: KM 2695 Carr Chetumal Puerto Aventuras 77750. **Location:** Oceanfront. **Facility:** This all-inclusive property offers

various activities for the entire family. Modern, well-appointed quest rooms feature stylish designs and relaxing tones. Most rooms offer an ocean view. Meets AAA guest room security requirements. 305 units. 7 stories, interior corridors. Parking: on-site and valet. Amenities: safes. Dining: 2 restaurants, entertainment. Pool: heated outdoor. Activities: sauna, hot tub, steamroom, beach on-site, cabanas, self-propelled boats, marina, scuba diving, snorkeling, recreation programs, kids club, bicycles, playground, game room, lawn sports, exercise room, spa. Guest Services: valet laundry, rental car service.























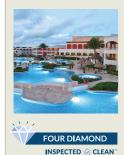








# HARD ROCK HOTEL RIVIERA MAYA BOOK NOW 984/875-1199



Resort Hotel. Address: Carr Cancun-Chetumal KM 72 77710. Location: Oceanfront. Facility: You can rock on and on at this all-includive, mega-resort offering a plethora of activities and dining options. One side of the property is exclusively for adults while the other caters to families. Meets AAA quest room security requirements. 1265 units, some two bedrooms. 3 stories, interior/exterior corridors. Parking: on-site and valet. Amenities: safes. Dining: 6 restaurants, nightclub, entertainment. Pool: outdoor, heated outdoor. Activities: sauna, hot tub, steamroom, beach on-site, cabanas, self-propelled boats, scuba diving, snorkeling, tennis, recreation programs, kids club, bicycles, playground, game room, lawn sports, health club, spa. Guest Services: valet laundry, area transportation.

































### **PUERTO MORELOS, QUINTANA ROO**

About halfway between Cancún and Playa del Carmen, Puerto Morelos (PWEHR-toh moh-REH-los) is a peaceful, unhurried fishing village with palm-shaded beaches and restaurants serving fresh seafood. It's the perfect place to while away a lazy afternoon in the shade of a thatched palapa on a white-sand beach while gazing at the beauty of aquamarine water.

Puerto Morelos is also the serene eye in the midst of a storm of tourism development. Flashy resorts and boutique hotels dot the Caribbean coast north toward Cancún, their manicured grounds occupying prime beachfront locations.

These upscale properties are a world away from the humble posadas and economical motels in town.

An offshore reef, part of the Great Mesoamerican Reef system that runs along Mexico's Caribbean coast, is a protected national marine park. In addition to creating excellent snorkeling and diving opportunities, the reef acts to break up waves before they reach the shoreline, which makes Puerto Morelos beaches safe for wading and swimming.

Frequent first-class bus service is available from Puerto Morelos to both Cancún and Playa del Carmen. Two stations, one for northbound buses and one for southbound buses, are on Mex. 307. The fare to either city is around

Please refer to pages 10-11 for Inspected Clean details.

50 pesos. Colectivos (white minivans) also provide transportation both in town and between towns; the in-town fare is an inexpensive 10 pesos. Taxi rates are set, not metered; agree on a price before you get in the cab.

The main square is the local hangout. Alma Libre Books has a large selection of used paperbacks and other titles in English. It's open daily 10-6 during the high tourist season. Also on the square is the Casa Martín grocery market.

Dive shops in town provide guided deep-sea fishing trips on local pangas or a larger vessel with a cabin; catches include barracuda, billfish and grouper. They also offer scuba and snorkeling excursions to the reef, which teems with brilliantly colored tropical fish, all sorts of crustaceans, rays, eels, nurse sharks and sea turtles, plus a wrecked military vessel that divers can explore.

Dive In Puerto Morelos, Av. Rojo Gómez #14 (several doors north of the town square), has knowledgeable, PADI-certified guides. A reef snorkeling trip (plus a 20peso park fee) costs \$30 (U.S.); an open water one-tank dive is \$70; a half-day excursion to dive at a local cenote (two tanks, plus lunch) is \$160. For information and reservations phone (998) 206-9084 (cell number), or (801) 738-0169 (from the United States).

# AZUL BEACH RESORT RIVIERA CANCUN BOOK NOW 998/872-8450



FOUR DIAMOND

INSPECTED @ CLEAN

Resort Hotel. Address: Bahia Petempich, KM 275 77580. Location: Oceanfront. Facility: This sprawling property offers multiple pools and theme dining options including Italian, Spanish and Mexican. Upgrade to a premium swim-out quest unit with butler service for the optimum experience. Meets AAA guest room security requirements. 435 units, some two bedrooms and efficiencies. 4 stories, interior/exterior corridors. Bath: shower only. Parking: on-site and valet. Amenities: safes. Dining: 3 restaurants, also, Le Chique, see separate listing, entertainment. Pool: outdoor. Activities: sauna, hot tub, steamroom, beach on-site, cabanas, self-propelled boats, fishing, scuba diving, snorkeling, tennis, recreation programs, kids club, playground, game room, exercise room, spa. Guest Services: valet laundry. (See ad on insert, starting on p. 136.)

































# BREATHLESS RIVIERA CANCUN RESORT & SPA BOOK NOW 998/283-0900







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Resort Hotel. Address: Bahia Petempich SM 12 Mz 41 LT 02-0 77580. Location: Oceanfront. Facility: Rooms at this upscale resort offer tons of space. illuminated headboards with custom settings, luxuriously soft bedding and tablets that allow you to connect with the various services and amenities. Meets AAA guest room security requirements. 362 units, some two bedrooms. 4 stories, exterior corridors. Parking: valet only. Terms: age restrictions may apply. Amenities: safes. Dining: 10 restaurants, nightclub, entertainment. Pool: heated outdoor. Activities: sauna, hot tub, steamroom, beach on-site, cabanas, self-propelled boats, fishing, scuba diving, snorkeling, tennis, recreation programs, lawn sports, exercise room, spa. Guest Services: valet laundry, rental car service.

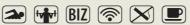


























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Resort Hotel. Address: Unidad 26 Mz 20 Lote 1-1 Sm 3 77580. **Location:** Oceanfront. **Facility:** Idle away hours in the free-form. lagoon-style pool and dine in a plethora of theme restaurants at this all-inclusive resort.

The many activities offer fun for all, day or night. Meets AAA guest room security requirements. 550 units. 4 stories, exterior corridors. Bath: shower only. Parking: valet only. Amenities: safes. Dining: 2 restaurants, entertainment. Pool: heated outdoor. Activities: sauna, hot tub, steamroom, beach on-site, self-propelled boats, fishing, scuba diving, snorkeling, miniature golf, tennis, recreation programs, kids club, bicycles, playground, game room, lawn sports, exercise room, spa. Guest Services: valet laundry, rental car service. 



# DREAMS RIVIERA CANCUN RESORT & SPA BOOK NOW 998/872-9200





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Resort Hotel. Address: Calle 55 SMZ 11 Mz 4 Lote 1-01 77580. Location: Oceanfront. Facility: This sprawling all-inclusive resort,

reflecting a tropical oasis, offers nine different room categories from which to choose. Many other perks include a world-class spa and gourmet dining. Meets AAA guest room security requirements. 486 units, some two bedrooms and efficiencies. 5 stories, interior/exterior corridors. Bath: shower only. Parking: on-site and valet. Amenities: safes. Dining: 3 restaurants, nightclub, entertainment. Pool: heated outdoor. Activities: sauna, hot tub, steamroom, beach on-site, cabanas, self-propelled boats, scuba diving, snorkeling, recreation programs, kids club, bicycles, playground, game room, lawn sports, exercise room, spa. Guest Services: valet laundry, rental car service, luggage security pick-up.



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Resort Hotel. Address: SM 11, Mz 9 Lote 10 77509. Location: Oceanfront. Facility: This all-inclusive resort's open-air,

Mayan-themed lobby and numerous activities make it a special destination for families. They have very spacious guest rooms, many of which include a sofa bed. Meets AAA quest room security requirements. 488 units. 3 stories (no elevator), exterior corridors. Bath: shower only. Parking: on-site and valet. Amenities: safes. Dining: nightclub, entertainment. Pool: outdoor, heated outdoor. Activities: sauna, hot tub, steamroom, beach on-site, cabanas, self-propelled boats, fishing, scuba diving, snorkeling, miniature golf, tennis, recreation programs, kids club, bicycles, playground, game room, lawn sports, trails, exercise room, spa. Guest Services: valet laundry, rental car service.





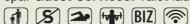




























# **EXCELLENCE RIVIERA CANCUN BOOK NOW** 998/872-8500





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Contemporary Resort Hotel, Address: KM 328 Carr Cancun-Chetumal 77580, Location: Oceanfront. Facility: Near the village of Puerto Morelos, this adults-only, all-inclusive resort offers an array of activities. All quest rooms are exceptionally spacious and the swim-out rooms are incredibly chic. Meets AAA quest room security requirements. 440 units. 4 stories, exterior corridors. Bath: shower only. Parking: on-site and valet. Terms: age restrictions may apply. Amenities: safes. Dining: 11 restaurants, entertainment. Pool: outdoor, heated outdoor. Activities: sauna, hot tub, steamroom, beach on-site, cabanas, self-propelled boats, scuba diving, snorkeling, tennis, recreation programs, bicycles, game room, lawn sports, exercise room, spa. Guest Services: valet laundry, area transportation.



























# MARGARITAVILLE ISLAND RESERVE RIVIERA CANCUN BOOK NOW 998/872-8080



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Resort Hotel. Address: Carr Federal Cancun, KM 275 77580. Location: Oceanfront. Facility: This resort features a relaxing island vibe with multiple pools and swinging beds around the lobby. Rooms offer luxuriously soft bedding, ample seating and enormous bathrooms with deep soaker tubs. Meets AAA quest room security requirements. 148 units, some houses. 2-3 stories, exterior corridors. Parking: on-site and valet. Amenities: safes. Dining: 2 restaurants, entertainment. Pool: outdoor. Activities: sauna, hot tub, steamroom, beach on-site, cabanas, self-propelled boats, fishing, snorkeling, recreation programs, kids club, playground, lawn sports, exercise room, spa. Guest Services: valet laundry. (See ad on insert, starting on p. 136.)

























# MARGARITAVILLE ISLAND RESERVE RIVIERA MAYA BOOK NOW 998/689-2600



Hotel. Address: Bahia Petempich, Carr Tulum 77580. Location: Oceanfront. Facility: Take some time to relax at this adults only resort. Well designed rooms feature fun beach decor and a beach bag and flip flops to make your beach visit easier. 355 units, some two bedrooms and efficiencies. 5 stories, exterior corridors. Parking: on-site and valet. Terms: age restrictions may apply. Amenities: safes. Dining: 4 restaurants, entertainment. Pool: outdoor. Activities: sauna, hot tub, steamroom, beach on-site, self-propelled boats, recreation programs, exercise room, spa. Guest Services: valet





ROYALTON RIVIERA CANCUN RESORT & SPA

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998/283-3939



Resort Hotel. Address: Carr Federal 307, KM 332 + 150 77580.



ROYALTON SPLASH RIVIERA CANCUN BOOK NOW 998/283-3939



Hotel, Address: Carr Federal Cancun Tulum Km 332 77580.



# SENSIRA RESORT & SPA RIVIERA CANCUN BOOK NOW 998/868-5460



Resort Hotel. Address: Carr Cancun-Tulum KM 275 77580. Location: Oceanfront. Facility: The spacious rooms feature beautiful custom furnishings, ceiling fans and oversized wood headboards with luxuriously soft bedding. The balcony sitting areas offer stunning views! Meets AAA quest room security requirements. 359 units. 6 stories, interior corridors. Bath: shower only. Parking: valet only. Amenities: safes. Dining: 5 restaurants, nightclub, entertainment. Pool: heated outdoor. Activities: sauna, hot tub, steamroom, beach on-site, cabanas, self-propelled boats, fishing, scuba diving, snorkeling, miniature golf, tennis, recreation programs, kids club, playground, lawn sports, exercise room, spa. Guest Services: valet laundry, rental car service.























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### WHERE TO EAT





Fusion Fine Dining. Address: Carr Federal Cancun, KM 275 77580. (See ad on insert, starting on p. 136.)

### TULUM, QUINTANA ROO

Tulum (too-LOOM), which anchors the south end of the Riviera Maya, benefits not only from Mexican Caribbean tourism in general but from proximity to the Tulum Ruins and several other nearby attractions. And it's compact enough that you can walk around and really soak up the local atmosphere, which radiates plenty of bohemian charm. The town is a bit of an international melting pot, where American tourists and young European backpackers mix with locals like the elderly matriarchs wearing huipiles, the colorfully embroidered white cotton blouses that remain standard garb for many Yucatecan women.

Mex. 307 is the main thoroughfare, and for more than a mile it is lined with restaurants, souvenir shops and small businesses—internet cafés, laundromats, loncherías (open-air lunch counters), tortilla stands, ice cream parlors, zapaterías (shoe stores), auto repair shops. Open-air produce markets are filled with clusters of bananas on stalks, green coconuts, tropical fruits and sacks of coffee beans.

Gift and souvenir shops along Mex. 307 offer the usual array of Mexican handicrafts along with hammocks, textiles, rugs and jewelry. Mixik, just north of Calle Jupiter (next to the ADO bus station), sells hand-carved wooden masks, hand-painted pottery and other high-quality folk art. There's another branch on the Tulum beach road to Punta Allen, across from the Zamas Hotel.

One of the best places to browse for treasures is Galería La Llorona, also on the beach road to Punta Allen (next to the Posada Lamar Cabanas). Here you'll find everything from Day of the Dead skeleton figurines and vibrantly colorful shoulder bags to blankets, handmade pillowcases and toys. The top floor of this large emporium is filled with antiques, custom-made furniture and works by local artists.

Explore Tulum's side streets, which extend a couple of blocks on both sides of Mex. 307. Note: Lateral streets with diagonal parking spaces run along either side of Mex. 307; use caution when entering the highway from one of these streets.

Parque dos Aguas, the town plaza, is just east of Mex. 307 behind the Ayuntamiento (City Hall) building, bordered by calles Osiris Sur and Alfa Sur. Shaded by coconut palms, it has a gazebo and is a community gathering place where kids play basketball and vendors set up shop on the adjacent sidewalks. The neighborhoods are a mix of cement block houses, traditional Mayan huts and dwellings with thatched roofs and walls made of sticks.

Early evening is a pleasant time for a stroll. Restaurants along Mex. 307 are casual; several have open-air seating in a garden setting, and some feature live music and dancing on certain nights. You're likely to hear the seductive sound of reggae wafting out of doorways and from behind courtyard walls.

Sidewalk taco vendors fill the air with the tantalizing aroma of grilling chicken and pork. In fact Tulum has a reputation for outstanding tacos, and a good place to sample them is Antojitos La Chiapaneca, on the west side of Mex. 307 near Calle Acuario. The specialty at this taqueria is tacos al pastor, rotisserie pork shaved off a slowly revolving spit onto corn tortillas and served with lime wedges. The salsa bar offers some fiery choices.

Seafood lovers should check out El Camello (The Camel), on Mex. 307 at the south end of town (on the east side of the highway at Avenida Kukulkan). This thatch-roofed, very casual joint has umbrella-shaded tables and simple plastic chairs out front. It serves up fresh fish and shrimp ceviches, octopus tacos and ice-cold *cervezas*. Try the shark dip, a spicy concoction of shark meat and salsa.

To reach the beaches, take the Cobá/Boca Paila road east off Mex. 307 (the intersection with a traffic signal at the northern end of town, signed "Playas/Punta Allen"). It runs through open scrub for about 3 kilometers (2 miles) before reaching the coast, where it forks north (toward the Tulum Ruins, with access to beaches along the way) and south to the hotel zone.

Take the right (south) fork, a narrow, winding paved road that hugs the coast. Campgrounds, cabanas and small boutique hotels line this lovely drive, bordered by lush growths of palms and other tropical vegetation. Some properties are nothing more than a grouping of palaparoofed huts just steps away from the beach. Some of these laid-back accommodations have signs designating them as "eco chic," meaning that they might rely on a generator for electricity and dispense with such amenities as TVs and phones.

Even if you're not staying in the Tulum hotel zone, it's well worth stopping at a restaurant for lunch and picturepostcard Caribbean views. The restaurant at the Zamas Hotel draws a loyal following to a breezy dining deck overlooking an unspoiled stretch of beach. Farther down the road, the restaurant at the Ana v José Charming Hotel & Spa serves great seafood and cocktails. You can dine inside under a big palapa roof, or if you prefer, atop a kingsize beach bed. Bring lots of cash.

Keep going to the southern end of the hotel zone and the beachfront, rustic-chic La Zebra Hotel. It attracts vacationing hipsters, but the excellent Mexican food at the Cantina restaurant—as well as the specialty cocktails and mojitos made with fresh sugar cane juice—will satisfy anyone. And the stretch of sand here is gorgeous.

The beaches along this section of coast not only boast powdery white sand and luminous turquoise water but are all but deserted. South of the entrance to the buffer zone of the Sian Ka'an Biosphere Reserve (see attraction listing), miles of uninhabited beaches edge the Boca Paila Peninsula.

Note: These are natural beaches, unlike the "groomed" stretches that front resort hotels; foot protection is recommended since the bottom is often rocky. Swim or snorkel only when seas are calm, beware of strong currents and stay close to shore; there are no lifeguards. Pull off the coast road to park, and do not leave valuables in your car. There are no facilities at these beaches; bring your own water and food.

Numerous cenotes dot the jungle scrub in the vicinity of Tulum. Technically speaking, a cenote (pronounced say-NOH-tay) is a sinkhole that forms when the ceiling of an underlying cave collapses. The Yucatán Peninsula, honeycombed with an underground network of porous limestone rock, also has many cavern systems through which subterranean rivers often flow. The pile of rubble left by a collapsed cave ceiling typically contains very few nutrients, so trees and plants that do manage to sprout send their roots through the rocks to tap the water below. This is why you'll often see tree roots descending into an underground cave from above.

From above ground many cenotes look just like normal ponds, and locals use them as swimming holes. Small tropical fish—such species as tetras and mollies that are commonly seen in home aquariums—live in these freshwater sinkholes, making them great places to snorkel. Most also have remarkably clear water, although the tannin from fallen dead leaves can stain the water in some cenotes, giving it the appearance of freshly brewed tea. In the heat of summer warm temperatures promote algae growth bloom that turns the water a cloudy green.

Cenote Cristal and Cenote Escondido are about 4 kilometers (2.5 miles) south of Tulum on opposite sides of Mex. 307 and can be reached via short gravel walking paths. These are typical cenotes of the "pond" variety. Watch for the Cenote Cristal parking area on the right side of the road (if headed southbound). Pay the 120-peso entrance fee at the palapa, which allows you to also visit Cenote Escondido across the road. Lock your car and do

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not leave valuables inside. You can also take a taxi here from town.

A sloping path leads to the pond, which is surrounded by tropical scrub vegetation. There's also a wooden platform from which you can take a dive into the cool, clear water. Snorkelers will see turtles and small tropical fish. At Cenote Escondido a ladder descends from a stone platform to the water. There are no facilities at either cenote, so bring your own drinking water and snacks. Both are open daily 9-5.

GRAN CENOTE is about 4 km (2.5 mi.) w. of Tulum via the road to the Cobá ruins (the jct. with Mex. 307 is at the n. end of town); watch for the signed turn-off on the right side of the road. From the entrance/parking area, access to the cenote is down a short path. This freshwater limestone sinkhole—shaped like a half moon—leads to a huge underground cave system. It offers good swimming and snorkeling in cool, clear blue water inhabited by fish and turtles. Divers, who suit up on the wooden decks overlooking the cenote, can explore subterranean caverns and passageways filled with stalactites and stalagmites. A series of wooden steps leads down to the water. Wear nonslip shoes while swimming or snorkeling.

About 3 kilometers (2 miles) farther down the road (watch for the turn-off on the left) is Car Wash Cenote, so named because locals once washed their vehicles here and you can drive right up to the water's edge. There's a diving platform for swimmers. This freshwater pond is home to lots of small tropical fish. Algae growth is heavy in the summer; the water is clearer during the winter months.

Snorkel gear and life jackets can be rented, or bring your own mask and gear. Parking, a snack bar and very basic restrooms are on site. **Time:** Allow 2 hours minimum.

TULUM RUINS are about 60 km (37 mi.) s. of Playa del Carmen and about a mile n. of the town of Tulum. The well-marked turn-off is on the e. side of Mex. 307; a large parking lot is less than 100 yds. e. of the highway. While not nearly as impressive or varied architecturally as Chichén Itzá or Uxmal, Tulum is notable for its dramatic setting overlooking the turquoise Caribbean.

One of the later Mayan outposts, this small but powerful city-state rose to prominence sometime during the 12th century. It was fortified on three sides by a wall—rather uncommon among Mayan cities—due to the coastal location, which was both strategic and vulnerable. A center for maritime commerce, Tulum was never conquered by the Spaniards, although it was abandoned some 75 years after the Spanish conquest of Mexico in 1521.

Some 60 structures are spread over a level, grassy area. The most imposing is The Castle (El Castillo), a pyramidal structure capped by a small temple that stands at the edge of a cliff above the sea. Also worth seeing is the Temple of the Frescoes (Templo de los Frescos) near the site entrance. It features interior murals that display typical Mayan motifs and exterior statues bearing still-discernible traces of paint. Just north of El Castillo is the Temple of the Descending God; the winged stucco figure over the doorway suggests a plummeting diver.

The structures cannot be climbed, and most have roped-off areas that visitors must stand behind, obscuring the view of some interior details. Weather permitting, bring a swimsuit—the lovely beach below can be reached by walking down a long staircase. Licensed, English-speaking guides are available, although the information you receive may or may not be historically accurate. In the evening, a light and sound show with audio and visual effects is offered.

There are restrooms, a bookstore, a restaurant and a few souvenir stands in the visitor center at the far end of the parking lot; the entrance to the site is about a 10-minute walk from the parking lot.

Wear nonslip walking shoes; the sandy, rocky terrain can be unexpectedly slippery. You'll also be on your feet, as there aren't really any places to sit. The porous limestone has created a few blowholes through which geysers of sea water can unexpectedly erupt and drench bystanders. The ruins are a popular day trip from Cancún and can be crowded depending on the time of year. **Time:** Allow 2 hours minimum. **Phone:** (984) 802-5405.

# **Nearby Destinations**

SIAN KA'AN BIOSPHERE RESERVE (Reserva de la Biosfera Sian Ka'an) encompasses the Boca Paila Peninsula and mainland Quintana Roo s. of Tulum and e. of Mex. 307. Designated as a protected area by the Mexican government in 1986, Sian Ka'an (the name means "place where the sky is born") includes a variety of habitats: tropical jungle, drier areas of tree-speckled savanna, coastal mangrove flats and some 70 miles of offshore coral reefs.

Most of the reserve is off limits to tourists, but the beaches and jungles on the Boca Paila Peninsula can be explored by visitors. Take the Boca Paila/Punta Allen road off Mex. 307 (turn left if traveling southbound, right if traveling northbound; the intersection has a traffic signal and is signed "Playas/Punta Allen"). The road runs east for a few miles and then continues south through Tulum's hotel zone. About 15 kilometers (9 miles) from the Mex. 307 junction is the entrance to the reserve, marked by a guardhouse building (Caseta de Control). Day visitors

must register at the guardhouse; from this point there is access to secluded beaches, and kayaks and bikes can be rented.

Tulum-based Sian Ka'an Community Tours offers guided excursions to the Muyil ruins as well as activities like a float down a canal while wearing a life jacket, boat tours and a trek through jungle to secluded, palm-lined beaches. Phone: (984) 871-2202 for Sian Ka'an Community Tour information and reservations.

XEL-HA is about 16 km (10 mi.) n. of the town of Tulum via a well-marked turn-off on the e. side of Tulum via a well-marked turn-off on the e. side of Mex. 307 (Km marker 240). The centerpiece of this water park (pronounced shell-HAH) is a beautiful lagoon surrounded by jungle. A natural aquarium with a mix of salt and fresh water, it provides an environment for brightly colored tropical fish that inhabit the underwater rock formations.

Snorkeling can be enjoyed without the undertows or strong currents that can make the beaches dangerous. and the clarity of the water is excellent. Snuba gear enables snorkelers to stay under water longer by breathing air through tubes that run to air tanks floating on the surface. For those on land there are viewing platforms built over the lagoon. Another popular activity is river floating; visitors are taken to a drop-off point by a shuttle train and then float slowly along with the current toward the sea.

Chuc Kay's Flight, a rope swing and the Cliff of Courage provide an exhilarating plunge into lagoon waters, while Trepachanga involves balancing between two ropes suspended above the river. Children's World has play areas and water activities geared toward younger kids, and a short distance away is a quiet area equipped with hammocks for a relaxing siesta.

Other activities include swimming in freshwater cenotes. hiking and biking along jungle trails and visiting a nursery/apiary where honey is harvested from stingless bees. Xel-ha also offers a dolphin swim program.

To fully enjoy the park get there early; it can become very crowded once the tour buses arrive. Dress casually and bring comfortable shoes. Life jackets are provided, and there is a first-aid station on site. All food services close at 5 p.m. Package tours from Cancún and Playa del Carmen that include round-trip transportation are available.

**Phone:** (998) 881-2733 from Cancun, (984) 206-0038 from Playa del Carmen, or (855) 326-0682 (toll-free from the United States and Canada).



ALOFT TULUM BOOK NOW 984/689-0431



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[SAVE] Hotel. Address: AvCoba Sur Mz5 Lt 1 Smz 1 Region 1 77760.



### DREAMS TULUM RESORT & SPA BOOK NOW 984/871-3333







AAA Benefit: Members save up to 10% and earn World of Hyatt points when booking AAA/CAA rates!

Resort Hotel. Address: Carr Chetumal Puerto Juárez KM 2367 77780. **Location:** Oceanfront. **Facility:** This family friendly,

all-inclusive beachfront resort offers plenty of pools, dining choices, beach activities and a weekly Mayan show. Each guest room has a furnished balcony or patio. Meets AAA guest room security requirements. 432 units. 2-3 stories (no elevator), interior/exterior corridors. Parking: valet only. Amenities: safes. Dining: 2 restaurants, nightclub, entertainment. Pool: outdoor, heated outdoor. Activities: sauna, hot tub, steamroom, beach on-site, self-propelled boats, scuba diving, snorkeling, tennis, recreation programs, kids club, playground, lawn sports, exercise room, spa. Guest Services: valet laundry.































### CHETUMAL, QUINTANA ROO

One of the oldest cities on the Yucatán Peninsula, Chetumal (cheh-too-MAHL) was a former Mayan stronghold. Three centuries of back-and-forth battles—some viciously barbaric—were waged as the Spanish attempted to wrest control of the region from the Maya. The city was renamed Payo Obispo in 1898 and recast as a border town dealing in jungle hardwoods, arms and smuggled goods. These checkered but profitable dealings came to an abrupt end in 1955, when a hurricane all but flattened the city.

The capital of Quintana Roo is at once a thriving port and a steamy backwater. Rickety clapboard buildings huddle under tropical trees ablaze with blooms in the older part of town. Belize, with which Chetumal shares tourist and commercial traffic, is just across the river. Waterfront Boulevard Bahía is bordered by small plazas. The large, modern bus terminal is north of downtown near the intersection of avenidas Héroes and Insurgentes; first-class bus service to Cancún and Mérida is offered by ADO.

Quintana Roo State Tourism Office (Secretaría de Turismo): Av. del Centenario #622. Phone: (983) 835-0860. ext. 1809 or 1810.

Shopping: Stores line Avenida Héroes, which begins at the bay and runs west through the market area. An incongruous touch in this downtown shopping district are the numerous shops selling Dutch cheeses, Japanese stereo equipment, French perfume and other international products, all at duty-free prices. The chance to purchase such items draws crowds of Mexican and Belizean tourists. While it is possible to find good buys on Yucatecan hammocks. U.S. and Canadian visitors should save their pesos and purchase Mexican crafts elsewhere. Like most Mexican markets, Chetumal's enormous and lively central market, across the street from the Museum of Mayan Culture, is fun to wander through.

MUSEUM OF MAYAN CULTURE (Museo de la Cultura Maya) is downtown on Av. de los Héroes between calles Colón and Gandhi, 5 blks. e. of Av. Alvaro Obregón (across from the Holiday Inn). Occupying an entire city block, it presents an excellent historical account of all things Mayan from around 1,000 B.C. to the conquest of the Yucatán in 1590. Touch screens, interactive exhibits and displays of paintings, sculpture and stela provide a detailed understanding of Mayan astronomy, architecture, mathematics, art, music, politics and religion. The central courtyard features a re-creation of a typical Mayan village complete with thatch-roofed huts, mini altars and work areas.

Most (not all) of the stela and artifacts are reproductions. There is a small museum bookstore near the ticket window that has books about the Maya in English. Exhibit information is in English and Spanish. The museum also is air conditioned, a rarity in this Third World border city. Time: Allow 2 hours minimum. Phone: (983) 832-6838.

### CHICHEN ITZA. YUCATÁN

The pyramids, temples and shrines at Chichén Itzá (chee-CHEHN eet-SAH)—the magnificent remains of a once-great Mayan city—were designated a World Heritage Site by UNESCO in 1988. It is believed that Chichén Itzá was founded sometime around A.D. 435; the first largescale excavations of the site began around the turn of the 20th century. Of the several hundred buildings believed to have once stood, only about 30 are fully restored. A few more remain as they were found, and the rest are hidden under rough, underbrush-covered mounds in the thick jungle scrub of the north-central Yucatán Peninsula.

### **Northern Zone**

Chichén Itzá is remarkable for both monumental scope and architectural variety. The ruins consist of two complexes connected by a dirt path. Generally speaking, the older southern section contains mostly Mayan ruins and the structures in the northern section combine Mayan and Toltec influences, although the blending of pre-Hispanic cultures is apparent throughout. The militaristic Toltec influence is evident in the images—jaguars, sharp-taloned eagles, phalanxes of marching warriors, feathered serpents—employed to decorate the exteriors of pyramids and temples.

El Castillo dominates the other Northern Zone ruins sprinkled over a level, grassy area. That this pyramid's builders were mathematically precise in their construction is borne out by a natural phenomenon that occurs at the spring and fall equinoxes (on or around Mar. 21 and Sept. 21). As the sun begins its descent, the shadows cast by the terraces on the north staircase form the body of a serpent, whose actual sculpted head rests at the base of the stairs. In the spring, the serpent appears to be slithering down the stairs; in the fall, the illusion is reversed. Note: Visitors from around the world attend this semiannual event, and although it is well worth seeing, expect large and boisterous crowds.

El Castillo also is deceptively steep; the large stone steps ascend to the top at a 45-degree angle. Visitors have traditionally been able to climb the 100-foot-tall pyramid using the staircases on three of its sides, with most people climbing the steps on the western side (the side you see as you first enter the site). But because of erosion to the steps and a fatality that occurred in 2006,

the base is roped off and climbing is not permitted on the pyramid or any other structure at the site.

Temples are at both ends of the ball court near El Castillo. The temple at the northern end has a short stairway ascending to two columns supporting a roof. It retains only a few remnants of its former murals and sculptures. The Temple of the Jaguars, at the southeastern corner of the ball court, has columns carved in the shape of serpents and panels depicting jaguars and Mayan warriors.

Just east of the ball court is the Temple of the Skulls (Tzompantli), decorated in macabre fashion with rows of human skulls. This artistic rendering reflects the gruesome act of human sacrifice that was integral to Mayan religious rites, as the heads of victims were often stuck on the ends of poles. The adjacent Platform of the Eagles and Jaguars has carvings showing these creatures grasping human hearts. A short distance east of this structure and north of El Castillo is the Platform of Venus. which has depictions of a feathered serpent (a reference to the god Quetzalcóatl) holding a human head in its mouth. Serpent carvings ascend the stairways.

Just south of the Temple of the Warriors are the partially restored remains of what archeologists believe were steam baths and a market complex. Further to the southeast are unrestored mounds of rubble beneath the trees.

### **Central Zone**

The southern complex of ruins (often mistakenly referred to as Old Chichén), accessible from the northern complex via a short dirt pathway, consists of mostly Mayan ruins. The first structure you come to is the Ossuary (High Priest's Grave), thought to be a burial ground. This partially reconstructed pyramid is topped with the remains of a temple and has distinctive serpent head carvings at the base. Its interior (not open to the public) leads to an underground cave in which human skeletons and offerings have been found.

Across the path and south of this pyramid is El Caracol, an astronomical observatory dating from the 10th century that may have been one of the last Mayan buildings erected at this site.

East of El Caracol a winding path leads north through dense underbrush to the Cenote Xtoloc. Unlike the Sacred Cenote, this well was not used for human sacrifice; it provided Chichén with its drinking water. South of El Caracol is the Nunnery (Casa de Las Monjas), so named by the Spaniards because it reminded them of a European convent. This large complex has exquisitely carved facades of animals, flowers and designs that are reminiscent of latticework. Next to the Nunnery is The Church (La Iglesia), also named by the Spanish. While it in no way

resembles a church, this small building is lavishly decorated, primarily with beak-nosed carvings of Chac.

The exterior carvings on the Temple of the Carved Panels (Templo de Los Tableros Esculpidos), east of the Nunnery, are more difficult to discern, but may refer to Toltec warrior symbology. A rough path, also beginning east of the Nunnery, runs through the scrub for several hundred feet to the Akab-Dzib, a classically designed Mayan temple believed to be one of Chichén Itzá's oldest structures. Traces of red handprints are faintly visible in some of the interior rooms, and above one doorway are carved Mayan hieroglyphics that have yet to be deciphered.

### **General Information and Activities**

Arrangements to join a group tour aboard a first-class bus can be made in Mérida, about 120 kilometers (75 miles) west, and Cancún, about 200 kilometers (125 miles) east. A group tour eliminates the hassle of driving but can make for a long, hectic day and requires sticking to a rigid schedule. Gray Line Cancún Tours offers a day trip package that includes round-trip transportation from Cancún or Mérida, guide service, park admission, a buffet lunch and a swim at a local cenote—a nice refresher after touring the hot, humid site. For reservations information phone (998) 887-2495 (in Mexico) or (800) 719-5465 (tollfree from the United States).

The ruins are a few miles south of the Chichen Itzá exit off Mex. 180-D; Yuc. 79 is the local road. One of the highway's two toll plazas is at this exit; from Cancún the tolls total around 325 pesos. You'll first pass through the small town of Pisté, on Mex. 180 about 2 kilometers (1.2 miles) west of the Chichén Itzá entrance. Here there are budget accommodations, restaurants and basic travel services for those who prefer to stay overnight. Taxi service also is available from Pisté to the site entrance. Several more upscale hotels are located east (and within walking distance) of the southern complex of ruins.

Chichén Itzá can be explored on your own or as part of a group led by a staff guide. A guide isn't necessary to appreciate the grandeur of the major landmarks, however, and information plagues in Spanish and English give a general architectural and historical background.

If you're visiting on your own, begin early in the morning if possible, before it gets too hot and the tour buses begin arriving. Wear a hat or other headgear and sturdy walking shoes. Bring bottled water and/or snacks as well as insect repellent for any extended walking excursions. Two to three hours is enough to see everything, although archeology buffs could easily spend the entire day.

A sound-and-light show is presented nightly. The ruins are bathed in colored lights, and Spanish narration recounts the history of and legends associated with the site. Headsets in several languages can be rented. Confirm the start time at the visitor center ticket window. There are occasional performances by big-name international musical stars as well.

The visitor center at the main entrance has an information desk (where admission tickets are purchased); a small museum; an air-conditioned auditorium, Chilam Balam, where an audiovisual presentation is shown; and a bookstore, restaurant and restrooms. There also are restrooms off the path between the northern and central zone complexes.

Food is available. Site open daily 8-5 (last admission at 4:30). Sound-and-light show begins at 7 or 8 p.m. (depending on season) and lasts about 45 minutes. Archeological zone admission (includes museum) 225 pesos (about \$10.72 U.S.). Sound-and-light show admission 212 pesos. Parking fee 30 pesos. Video camera fee 45 pesos. Phone (985) 851-0137.

THE CASTLE (El Castillo) is a short walk from the visitor center at the main entrance. Also called Kukulcán, the Mayan name for the Toltec king Quetzalcóatl, this 100-foottall pyramid has a perfectly symmetrical design. Each of the four sides is scaled by 91 steps; the total of 364 steps plus the top platform equaled the number of days in the Mayan year. El Castillo also is deceptively steep; the large stone steps ascend to the top at a 45-degree angle. Due to safety concerns, climbing El Castillo is not permitted.

An additional step underneath the pyramid, the 365th, signified a trip to the underworld. Each side also has 18 terraced sections—nine on either side of a central staircase, equaling the 18 months of the Mayan year—and 52 panels, corresponding to the number of years in the Mayan calendrical cycle.

Inside El Castillo is an older temple (not open to visitors) with a very narrow set of steps ascending to two claustrophobic inner chambers; one contains a reclining Chac Mool figure, the other a reddish throne in the shape of a jaguar with green jade eyes.

GREAT BALL COURT (Gran Juego de Pelota) is a short distance from the visitor center. Two walls run parallel to the playing field. The object of this ancient game was for two teams of players to maneuver a heavy rubber ball—without using their hands—through one of two stone rings placed high on each wall. Some participants (opinion is divided on whether they were winners or losers) apparently suffered death by decapitation. Stone carvings depict this act as well as players sporting protective padding and feathered headdresses. The acoustics are startling: Two people standing on opposite sides of the field and speaking in normal voices can easily hear each other.

**OLD CHICHÉN** (Chichén Viejo) is about a 15-minute walk down a dirt path that begins southwest of the Nunnery. A sincere interest in archeology and a local guide are both recommended for a trek to this area of little-restored buildings, which is mosquito-infested (wear plenty of insect repellent) and overgrown with jungle scrub. Avoid exploring during the June-through-September rainy season, when the narrow pathways can become difficult to navigate.

The barely uncovered buildings feature masks of Chac and gargoyle-like creatures carved along cornices. The Date Group of ruins includes the House of the Phalli, so named for some well-endowed sculptures carved into the walls of one room. The earliest date discovered in Chichén Itzá—the equivalent of A.D. 879—is carved into a lintel supported by columns; the rest of what was once a pyramid no longer remains.

SACRED CENOTE is about a 5-minute walk due n. of the Platform of Venus along a dirt path. This path was once a Mayan sacbe, or paved causeway. Two cenotes, or limestone sinkholes, served Chichén Itzá. The Sacred Cenote is a 190-foot-wide pit that was used for human sacrifice to appease the rain god Chac. The skeletons of men, women and children have been excavated, which suggests that in addition to young maidens—the preferred sacrificial victim—the diseased and mentally ill also may have been drowned in the well.

Excavations of the cenote have unearthed bones, idols, jewelry, jade objects and other artifacts from different parts of Mexico, leading archeologists to believe that pilgrimages to Chichén Itzá continued long after its abandonment.

THE SNAIL (El Caracol) is in the southern group of ruins. Also called "The Winding Stair," its name is a reference to the interior winding staircase (not open to the public) that leads to the dome. This ruin's round construction is quite possibly unique in Mayan architecture. Stones could be removed from slits within the dome—nine in all—enabling Mayan astronomers to study different parts of the heavens. Some interesting carvings decorate the dome's exterior.

**TEMPLE OF THE WARRIORS** (Templo de los Guerreros) is a short distance e. of El Castillo. This Toltec-influenced temple has impressive rows of carved warriors and a roof boasting fine sculptural details of the rain god Chac, feathered serpents and mythical animals; it is guarded by a reclining Chac Mool figure. Next to the temple is the Group of the Thousand Columns, thought to have housed the residences of Chichén's ruling elite. The rows of Toltec-style pillars (in actuality, far fewer than 1,000) are covered with bas-relief. Climbing is not permitted.

### **Nearby Destinations**

BALANCANCHÉ CAVES (Grutas de Balancanché) are about 6 km (4 mi.) e. of the Chichén Itzá ruins via Mex. 180 (the free road to Valladolid), then down a very short gravel road to the entrance; follow signs. In 1959 a Chichén Itzá tour guide was exploring a network of caverns and discovered a secret passageway that led to a huge floor-to-ceiling stalagmite surrounded by Mayan ceremonial objects, offerings to the rain god Tlaloc. The artifacts are exhibited in the same locations in which they were found. There also is a small museum and a botanical garden at the site.

**Note:** The cave is hot and humid, with a dimly lit but well-maintained trail that includes many steep stairways; wear sturdy shoes. The tour is not recommended for those who are claustrophobic.

Time: Allow 1 hour minimum. Phone: (999) 930-3760 (Merida Secretary of Tourism office; only Spanish is spoken).

# COBÁ, QUINTANA ROO

Cobá (coh-BAH) translates roughly as "waters stirred by wind." This small village is about 66 kilometers (40 miles) northwest of Mex. 307; the Tulum/Cobá road branches off Mex. 307 just north of the town of Tulum. From Cancún, take Mex. 180 west to X-Can, then the paved road south about 43 kilometers (26 miles). The village is about a mile west of the road via a turn-off.

COBÁ RUINS are 43 km (27 mi.) n.w. of Tulum via the paved, well-marked road (Mex. 109) that branches off Mex. 307 just n. of Tulum and runs n. to Mex. 180 (near Valladolid); follow signs to the ruins entrance. Spreading east from the shore of a lagoon just outside the small town of the same name, this city/ceremonial center dates from between A.D. 600 to 900—older than both Chichén Itzá and the Tulum ruins—and at its height may have supported as many as 50,000 inhabitants.

Excavations began in earnest in the early 1970s. It is believed that as many as 6,500 structures exist. Temples, pyramids and elaborately carved stela (vertical stone tablets) are surrounded by palm tree thickets, tropical hardwoods and roping vines. Cobá has a much more primeval feel than other Yucatán ruins, increasing its sense of mystery.

Nohoch Mul ("large hill"), a 138-foot-high pyramid towering above the flat landscape (about a half-hour walk from the site entrance), is the tallest structure of its kind in the northern Yucatán—rising even higher than the Pyramid of the Magician at Uxmal. It can be climbed; hold onto the rope that runs up one side. The Cobá Group, a cluster of ruins on the right after you enter the site, contains another massive pyramid, the Temple of the Churches (Templo de las Iglesias). Climbing is permitted on the lower levels of many structures, but some sections are blocked off; heed the signs that prohibit climbing.

Bicycle taxi guides can be hired at the entrance, and bikes are available for rent. A bike is the best way to see these ruins; get here early enough and you'll practically have the place to yourself.

**Note:** If you're not part of an organized tour group, arrive as early as possible to avoid the hordes of tour buses that start showing up between 10 and 11 a.m. The heat, humidity and mosquitoes can be formidable; wear sturdy walking shoes and bring insect repellent and drinking water. **Time:** Allow 2 hours minimum. **Phone:** (984) 206-7166. **GT TI** 

# COZUMEL, QUINTANA ROO—

See Cozumel, Quintana Roo p. 112.

ISLA MUJERES, QUINTANA ROO— See Isla Mujeres, Quintana Roo p. 122.

KANTENAH, QUINTANA ROO— See Kantenah, Quintana Roo p. 126.

# MÉRIDA, YUCATÁN

Capital of the state of Yucatán, Mérida (MEH-ree-dah) is an intriguing mix of modern and timeless, offering visitors sights both comfortingly familiar and exotically foreign.

Founded in 1542 by Francisco de Montejo at the site of T'ho, an ancient Mayan city, Mérida grew into the commercial, governmental and religious center of the Yucatán Peninsula. In the last half of the 19th century the city flourished thanks to henequen, a tough, thorny member of the agave family. The fibrous leaves of this plant, which thrives in the region's rocky soil and seasonally dry conditions, were made into twine, burlap sacks, furniture stuffing, hammocks and other products.

During the late 19th-century heyday of the henequen plantations, hacienda owners were an island unto themselves, since the peninsula lacked road and rail access and was isolated from the rest of Mexico. Wealthy Meridanos built imposing, Moorish- and rococo-style mansions with arched doorways and marbled tile interiors. Some of these buildings still stand along Paseo Montejo, the city's wide showcase boulevard.

Mérida's tropical backdrop and variety of cultural offerings make it an appealing destination for travelers. It also makes a convenient base from which to explore several nearby, notable Mayan ruins.

### **Planning Your Stay**

There are plenty of things to do in Mérida. Visit the museums and public buildings that cluster around the main square, Plaza de la Independencia (also called Plaza Grande). Explore the bustling downtown markets and a slew of hip art galleries. Take a horse-drawn carriage ride down Paseo Montejo. Last but not least, sample authentic Yucatecan cuisine in a city celebrated for its restaurants.

For *Mérida en Domingo* (Mérida on Sunday), the streets surrounding the plaza are closed to traffic. Mexican families dressed in their Sunday best make for a great people-watching promenade as they stroll among the pushcart vendors selling *tortas* (sandwiches), fruit drinks, corn on the cob, fried cornmeal balls and mango slices dusted with chile powder.

Sunday also is the best day to experience some of Mérida's many public events. The city police orchestra performs typical Yucatecan music in Santa Lucía Park, on Calle 60 about 3 blocks north of Plaza de la Independencia. Groups of musicians in front of the Government Palace (Palacio del Gobierno) play everything from classical to jazz. A folkloric ballet interpretation of a Yucatecan wedding celebration is enacted at City Hall (Palacio Municipal), on the west side of the main plaza, while marimba music can be heard at Hidalgo Park (also called Cepeda Peraza Park), a block northeast at calles 59 and 60.

Saturday evenings also are active; the downtown area is closed to traffic, and restaurants move tables outside so diners can hear bands performing at the plazas. The music often continues until around 2 a.m.

Guided tour operators abound, many offering the same itineraries with different transportation (from economical buses to luxurious private vehicles). City tours last a couple of hours and take in the public buildings around the main plaza, Paseo Montejo, and the Museum of Anthropology and History. Popular day trips travel to Chichén Itzá or Uxmal, with admission to the ruins, lunch, a guide and often a swim at a hotel pool included in the price.

Mérida has a tropical climate. April through September are quite hot and humid, and in May the temperature can reach 100 degrees. If you're visiting during one of these months, sightsee in the morning, take it easy in the afternoon and venture out again in the evening, when it cools down somewhat. December through February are cooler and also less humid. The rainy season is June through September, but

precipitation isn't usually heavy or persistent enough to affect travel plans. The greatest chance for hurricanes or other stormy weather is in September and October.

Many Mexican families go on vacation in July and August; make hotel reservations in advance if you'll be visiting during these months.

### **Practicalities**

Manuel Crecencio Rejon International Airport is off Mex. 180 (Avenida Benito Juárez, also called Avenida Itzaes), about 7 kilometers (4 miles) southwest of the city center. American Airlines, Aeroméxico and United offer direct flights from the United States. Other airlines providing service to the airport include Delta and Volaris. For additional information about airlines see Arriving by Air, page p. 28.

By car, the main approach from the east is Mex. 180, which becomes east-west Calle 65 within the city limits. To get to the downtown hotel zone (where such major hotels as the Hyatt Regency and the Fiesta Americana are located), take Calle 65 west to north-south Calle 60 and turn right.

Mex. 180 also approaches Mérida from the southwest via Campeche. Mex. 261 approaches from the south, joining Mex. 180 at the town of Umán, just south of the city limits. North of downtown, the northern extension of Calle 60 continues north as Mex. 261 to Progreso on the gulf coast.

A loop road, the Anillo Periférico, encircles Mérida, offering access to regional destinations without having to negotiate the downtown area. It can be confusing, however, unless you're familiar with the exits. The most direct way out of the city from the Paseo Montejo/hotel zone area is to take east-west Avenida Colón west to Avenida Itzaes, a major north-south thoroughfare on the west side of town. Turn left (south); you'll pass Centenario Park and the turn-off to the airport before reaching the Anillo Periférico—a distance of about 12 kilometers (7 miles).

**Note:** Avenida Itzaes changes names twice without warning—to Avenida Internacional and then to Avenida Benito Juárez—as it proceeds south. Don't get sidetracked by the name changes; stay on the avenue.

At the periférico junction there are signs for Cancún (Mex. 180 east), Progreso (Mex. 261 north) and Campeche (Mex. 180 southwest). To head south toward Uxmal and nearby archeological sites, continue south a mile or two on Avenida Itzaes/Internacional/Juárez to Umán. Watch for signs saying "To Campeche via Uxmal on Mex. 261," "Zona Arqueologica Uxmal" and "Ruta Puuc." Follow these signs to access Mex. 261 south.

To head east toward Cancún, turn left onto the periférico at the sign that says "Cancún/Motul." Take this four-lane

divided highway about 15 kilometers (9 miles) to the Mex. 180/Cancún exit. From this point, two-lane Mex. 180 runs about 48 kilometers (30 miles) east to the town of Hoctún. At Km marker 66, Mex. 180 divides. The two-lane "libre" (free) road continues east toward the town of Kantunil, and the four-lane divided Mérida-Cancún "cuota" (toll) highway begins.

City bus #79 (designated "Aviación") takes airport passengers to the downtown area but is unreliable and slow; if you're carrying any amount of luggage it's more convenient to take a taxi. Colectivo (group) minivans transport passengers from the airport to downtown hotels for about \$8 (U.S.) per person; taxi fare runs about \$18 between the airport and downtown hotels.

The first-class bus station, Terminal CAME (Centro de Autobuses de Mérida), is on Calle 70 between calles 69 and 71, about 4 blocks southwest of Plaza Principal, the main plaza. Buses travel frequently to and from Chichén Itzá, Úxmal, Cancún, Campeche, Playa del Carmen, Tulum and Palenque. "Deluxe" service to many of these destinations is offered by ADO lines GL and UNO. For additional information about buses see Bus Service, page p. 36.

Sitios (taxi stands) are located in the vicinity of the main plaza, or use a cab affiliated with your hotel. Rates to intown destinations are fixed and can be expensive; ask what the fare is before getting in the cab. *Colectivo* taxis (usually white Volkswagen minivans) also take passengers to various city destinations on a first-come, firstserved basis; look for them around the main plaza.

Mérida has a tourist police force that patrols on foot and motorcycle in the downtown core and also in the hotel zone, the area along Avenida Colón between Paseo Montejo and Calle 60. Officers wear white-and-brown or blue uniforms and a sleeve patch that says "Policia Turística." If you need police assistance within the downtown area, phone (999) 942-0060.

In the event of an emergency, dial 911. In case of medical emergency, contact the Red Cross (Cruz Roja); dial 911 or phone (999) 924-9813. If you're in need an ambulance, contact Clinica de Mérida; phone (999) 920-3914. The clinic is downtown at Avenida Itzaes #242, 5 blocks southwest of Parque de las Américas. Note: It goes without saying that any calls to public services will be much easier if you speak fluent Spanish.

The rates offered at the airport and by banks and casas de cambio (currency exchange houses) do not differ greatly, so exchanging dollars for pesos comes down to a matter of convenience. There are several casas de cambio in the vicinity of the big downtown hotels.

The Mérida English Library, Calle 53 #524 (between calles 66 and 68), functions as a meeting place for the English-speaking community throughout the city. The library offers internet access as well as community information, and also sponsors guided house and garden tours on Tuesdays from November through March; tour fee is 200 pesos per person. It is open Mon.-Sat. 9-1 (also Mon. 6:30-9:30 p.m.); phone (999) 924-8401.

### **City Layout**

El Centro, Mérida's downtown core, is compact and dense. A grid pattern of numbered streets radiates from the main plaza. Even-numbered streets (calles) run northsouth, odd-numbered streets run east-west. Some are lined with beautiful old buildings—and many more shabby ones.

Most of these streets are narrow and one way. Vespa motor scooters and beat-up bikes abound, and traffic is heavy and slow. Elsewhere in the city thoroughfares are not well signed and change names without warning. They also can twist and turn confusingly, so know where you're going.

Where buildings stand close together and sidewalks are very narrow, exhaust spewed by green city buses is a near-constant irritant. This area is roughly bounded by Calle 49 on the north, Calle 67 on the south, Calle 52 on the east and Calle 66 on the west.

Fortunately Mérida also is a city of tree-filled plazas that are oases of relative tranquility amid the street noise and traffic jams. Plaza de la Independencia is bounded east and west by calles 60 and 62 and north and south by calles 61 and 63. Here and at other city plazas you'll see confidenciales. S-shaped white stone benches that allow two people to face each other while talking. The cathedral and the aristocratic facades of government buildings border this plaza.

Calle 60 is a busy street filled with restaurants, handicraft shops selling clothing, jewelry and trinkets, and several fine examples of colonial architecture. From the northeast corner of Plaza de la Independencia, walk north. In the next block is cozy little Hidalgo Park, where there are several outdoor restaurants. At the corner of calles 60 and 57 is the imposing, Italianate Peón Contreras Theater (Teatro Peón Contreras); climb the marble steps and wander around inside.

Broad, tree-lined Paseo Montejo begins at Calle 47, about 7 blocks northeast of Plaza de la Independencia. It has much wider sidewalks than you'll encounter in other parts of the city, a relief from the cramped spaces of El Centro. Montejo runs north for 10 blocks past hotels, shops, sidewalk cafés and several large, ornate 19thcentury mansions. It culminates at the Monument to

Patriotism (Monumento a la Patria), a grouping of sculptures within a traffic circle that depict various stages of Mexican history.

Along Paseo Montejo is the Mérida Sculpture Walk, a collection of changing outdoor art. It begins with the large sculpture in the traffic circle at Montejo and Calle 47; from there walk south along Montejo to the corner of Avenida Colón, near the U.S. Embassy. The final sculpture is the beautifully carved trunk of a tree that was killed by Hurricane Isidore in 2002.

For a peek inside one of the street's impressive residences, take a guided tour of Quinta Montes Molina, Paseo de Montejo #469 (at Calle 56). Still owned by the same family, the mansion is a popular location for wedding receptions and "sweet 16" parties. The lavish rooms are filled with European furniture, alabaster and porcelain sculptures, sumptuous crystal chandeliers and Art Deco decorative accents. One-hour tours in English are given Mon.-Fri. at 9, 11 and 3, Sat. at 9 and 11; the fee is 50 pesos. Phone (999) 925-5999.

Sunday is the best day to take a ride on a *calesa* (horse-drawn carriage). Most of them can be found in the vicinity of Plaza de la Independencia or along Calle 60, and they have designated routes. A 45-minute ride should cost about \$20 (U.S.); confirm the fare before you set out.

### **Shopping**

Mérida has long been known for markets selling hammocks (hamacas), clothing (especially the men's shirt called a guayabera), Panama hats (jipis) and henequén handicrafts. The market district extends roughly from calles 63 to 69 north-south and from calles 54 to 62 east-west (the area just southeast of Plaza de la Independencia) and encompasses numerous shops and open-air stalls.

The Municipal Market (Mercado Municipal), centered at calles 65 and 56, is a hodgepodge of fruit, vegetables, live chickens, tortilla stands, spices and candy, all presided over by *huipil*-clad *señoras* who bring their wares from the small Mayan villages around Mérida. Here you'll find baskets, pottery, gold earrings, gold and silver filigree jewelry, and pieces of amber-colored incense.

Native handicrafts from all over Mexico, but particularly the Yucatán region, are in a separate building at calles 56 and 67. Look for table mats, purses, leather goods, hammocks, piñatas, clothing, ceramics and *huaraches* (sandals with leather straps and soles made from old tires).

Fixed prices prevail at many shops, but you can bargain at some of the market stalls and with street vendors. Haggling in this crowded, noisy atmosphere is not for everyone. Although many vendors speak English, a knowledge of Spanish would be very handy for asking specific questions about merchandise. If you're uncomfortable around high-pressure sales tactics, stick to the fixed-price shops.

Hammocks—often used in the rural Yucatán in place of beds—are fashioned from various materials and come in several sizes. To judge the proper size, hold one end of the hammock even with the top of your head. Let the other end drop—if it reaches the floor and then some, it's probably big enough. Those made from cotton tend to be the most durable.

Street vendors will harangue prospective hammock purchasers, but their low prices may also indicate low quality. Shops specializing in hammocks offer a greater selection. Wherever you buy a hammock, check the workmanship carefully, since a poorly made or loosely woven one will wear out quickly.

The guayabera, a loose, lightweight cotton shirt, is about as formal as men's clothing gets in sweltering Mérida. Upper-class Yucatecans in the late 19th century bought them during trips to Cuba. The garment is worn by businessmen and local politicians instead of a shirt and tie. Traditionally it is white, with a bit of colored embroidery around the front buttons, and has four pockets—two at the chest and two at the waist. Guayaberas Jack, on Calle 59 between calles 60 and 62, is one of the few city factories that still produces custom-made shirts.

Just as traditional as the *guayabera* is the *huipil*, a white cotton dress with a squared neck that often is edged with embroidered flowers. A similar but longer and more elaborate garment is the *terno*. Many women who live in rural areas still wear a *huipil*. Handmade dresses have largely been supplanted by machine-made ones, although the latter are usually of good quality.

A jauntily positioned *jipi* (HEE-pee) provides an effective screen against the hot Yucatán sun. The hats are made in several small towns in neighboring Campeche; residents store palm fronds in damp basements until they become soft and pliable, then weave them. Panama hats cost anywhere from about \$6 to more than \$60 (U.S.); the price is determined by the closeness of the weave and the quality of the fibers (coarse to fine). A good-quality, closely woven hat should bounce back into shape even after being folded into a suitcase or rolled up and stuck in a pocket.

In addition to the traditional markets and souvenir stands, fashion-conscious, youth-oriented boutiques are springing up around El Centro. Tejon Rojo, Calle 53 #502 (between calles 60 and 62), sells handcrafted, repurposed items, in addition to T-shirts with the store's name (which means "red badger") and logo as well as graphic images of Latin icons like Frida Kahlo and Cantinflas. This shop has quite the hipster vibe.

Kukul Bout'ik, Calle 55 #513 (between calles 60 and 62) sells clothing, women's jewelry and housewares. Nahualli Casa de los Artistas, Calle 60 #405, is a gallery owned by a husband and wife. The paintings, sculptures and other works on display here are vividly creative, and the exhibition space, located in a colonial-style building, is a stunning backdrop for the art.

### **Dining and Nightlife**

This is a great place to sample some of the Yucatán's culinary specialties. Papadzules are tortillas stuffed with chopped hard-boiled eggs and topped with pumpkinseed or tomato sauce. Poc-chuc is slices of pork marinated in sour orange juice and served with pickled onions; pollo pibil is herb-infused chicken wrapped in banana leaves and baked.

Sopa de lima is a soup containing shredded chicken and strips of fried tortilla and flavored with lime juice. Salbutes are puffy fried tortillas topped with shredded turkey. lettuce and pickled onions. The incendiary habanero chile is provided on the side rather than in the dish at most establishments (ask to make doubly sure).

Beverages are intriguing as well. While *licuados* liquified fruit drinks—are sold in many parts of Mexico, they are especially refreshing in Mérida, where the vendors can draw from a variety of melons, pineapple and other tropical flavors. Licuado stands are marked by rows of colorful fruit. Another common beverage is horchata, a blend of ground rice and almonds, water and ice, sweetened with raw sugar, cinnamon, vanilla or honey. See the Lodgings & Restaurants section for AAA Diamond designated dining establishments.

Mérida is a fairly safe city to walk around in after dark. At dusk, Plaza de la Independencia and adjoining Hidalgo Park are alive with families watching street performers, listening to musicians, grabbing a bite to eat or just relaxing on benches. Sidewalk vendors set up along nearby streets, selling everything from *tortas* to heavy metal CDs.

There is free evening entertainment at downtown parks and plazas several nights a week. On Monday beginning at 9 p.m. a folkloric dance troupe performs vaguerías (traditional Yucatecan dances) in front of City Hall (Palacio Municipal), on Calle 62 across from Plaza de la Independencia. For event schedule information, check at the Peón Contreras Theater or one of the city tourist offices.

Yucatán State Tourism Office: in the Peón Contreras Theater, on Calle 60 between calles 57 and 59. The office is open daily 8 a.m.-9 p.m. Phone: (999) 924-9290 (English spoken).

The publication Yucatán Today, available at the airport and most hotels, has detailed information about city and state attractions and includes maps.

### Downtown

CITY MUSEUM (Museo de la Ciudad) is at calles 61 and 58 across the street from Plaza de la Independencia. It has paintings, photographs and drawings illustrating Mérida's history, with exhibit information in English. Phone: (999) 923-6869.

**GOVERNMENT PALACE** (Palacio de Gobierno) is on the n. side of Plaza de la Independencia. It dates from 1892. Take the wide stairway to the second floor, where the walls of one room are adorned with murals by Meridano artist Fernando Castro Pacheco depicting traditional Mayan symbols as well as the violent appropriation of their culture by the Spanish. A hall of history, also on the second floor, chronicles the destruction by Spanish bishop Diego de Landa of the Mayan *codices*, pictorial history books.

### In and Around the City

**DZIBILCHALTÚN RUINS** (zeeb-eel-chal-TOON) are about 15 km (9 mi.) n. of Mérida; take Calle 60 n. out of the city, following signs for Progreso and Mex. 261. The paved turn-off is marked by a sign that says "Dzibilchaltún/Universidad del Mayab." The site entrance is another 5 km (3 mi.) e. Although this is one of Mexico's largest archeological discoveries, not much remains of its former glory. More than 8,000 ruins, mostly mounds of rubble or the remains of low platforms, have been uncovered so far. The cluster of excavated altars and other structures are aligned along a walkway.

The reconstructed House of the Seven Dolls (Templo de las Siete Muñecas), a raised temple, was named for the seven primitive figures discovered buried under the structure's floor. Exhibiting such deformities as a hunchback and a swollen belly, they may have served as spiritual "messengers" during ceremonies to cure illness. There is a good site museum that exhibits carved stone tablets and stela, panels and finely detailed limestone carvings (including a life-size gorilla carrying a human); paintings and Yucatán artifacts from the Spanish colonial period; weapons associated with the 19th-century War of the Castes; and machines used to harvest henequen.

Public transportation to the site is readily available via taxi or shuttle van; colectivo vans departing from San Juan Park in downtown Mérida (Calle 69 between calles 62 and 64) go directly to the ruins. Time: Allow 2 hours minimum. **Phone:** (999) 922-0193. **GT** 

MUSEUM OF THE MAYAN WORLD (Gran Museo del Mundo Maya) is about 12 km (7 mi.) n. of downtown on Calle 60/Mex. 261 to Calle 60 #299E. The dramatically contemporary building houses four permanent

exhibition halls showcasing a collection of replicas of Mayan artifacts, from religious relics to ancient stone sculptures and gold and jade objects. Each hall focuses on a different theme: The Mayans, Nature and Culture; Mayans of Today; Yesterday's Mayans; and Ancient Mayans.

Most of the displays have background information in Spanish. One of the galleries features rotating exhibits. A highlight is the spectacular, five-act sound-and-light show shown in the MAYAMAX Theater, which depicts the creation of the Mayan world. On Tuesdays, when the museum is closed, the show is projected on the outside wall at 9 p.m.

**Note:** The museum is north of downtown; if you don't have a car, the easiest way to get there is by bus. Yellow "Mini 2000" buses travel up and down Calle 60; look for one with the destinations Xcumpich, Tapetes or Komchen on the windshield, and ask the driver to announce the museum stop. **Phone:** (999) 341-0435.

### **Nearby Destinations**

Mérida makes a good base for day trip excursions to the small towns and villages in the state of Yucatán. Most of them have interesting churches and bustling markets, and it's a nice opportunity to get out of the city, see the countryside and mingle with the locals.

If you want to visit a typical Yucatecan pueblo located just outside the Mérida city limits, take Avenida Itzaes (Mex. 180) southbound past the airport to the Anillo Periférico loop road, then follow the directional signs for Umán. In the vicinity of the town's main plaza, which is dominated by a large church, are small shops and sidewalk vendors selling food and trinkets. Triciclo drivers line up waiting to transport locals. A triciclo is the reverse of a tricycle—two wheels in front supporting a cargo/carrier area, and one in the back below the driver's seat. People, live chickens and crates of produce are all transported by means of this cheap transportation.

Hacienda Yaxcopoil is about 32 kilometers (20 miles) south of Mérida. From downtown take Avenida Itzaes southbound to the Anillo Periférico. Access Mex. 180 (the road is signed "Libramiento Umán" but bypasses the town of Umán), continue south and exit at Mex. 261. Stay on Mex. 261, following the signs for Uxmal. The small village of Yaxcopoil (yash-coh-poh-EEL) is about 11 kilometers (7 miles) south of the exit; watch for the marked turn-off to the hacienda ("Antigua Hacienda y Museo Yaxcopoil"), distinguished by a Moorish double arch, on the right at Km marker 186.

Operating first as a cattle ranch and later as a henequén plantation, this was once one of the most important haciendas in the Yucatán. Although now showing great age and some ruin, the Moorish-style architecture of Casa

Principal, the main building, and its drawing rooms, highceilinged corridors and lush garden areas hint at the gracious lifestyle enjoyed by wealthy late 19th-century plantation owners.

The Maya Room in the main building has displays of pottery and artifacts excavated from nearby Mayan ruins. The property is safe to visit and interesting to explore. Hacienda tours are given Mon.-Sat. 8-6, Sun. 9-3. Admission 100 pesos. Phone (999) 900-1193 (cell number).

### The Convent Route

The Convent Route (Ruta de Los Conventos) south from Mérida via Mex. 18 passes through a string of rural towns and villages. From the downtown historic center, take Calle 59 east to the Anillo Periférico loop road, then take the Anillo Periférico south to the exit for Mex. 18 (signed "Kanasin"). Two-lane Mex. 18 heads south, passing through small Yucatecan communities distinguished by their impressively large churches.

About 22 kilometers (14 miles) south of Kanasin is the town of Acanceh (ah-con-KAY). A Mayan pyramid, a colonial-era church and a present-day church all stand on the town plaza. About 8 kilometers (5 miles) beyond Acanceh is Tecoh (tay-KO), where the town market is dwarfed by a large church and convent dedicated to the Virgin of the Assumption. The church is built atop the raised platform that was once the foundation for a Mayan pyramid and is reached by a broad stone stairway.

This 16th-century building has a rough stone exterior capped by twin towers similar in appearance to the cathedral in Mérida. Inside is a soaring, beautifully ornamented retablo that was restored in the late 1990s. It features four large paintings that are the work of Mexico's famed baroque artist Miguel Cabrera. In addition to the main altarpiece, the church also is graced with two smaller *retablos* dedicated to the Virgin Mary, both resplendent with gold decoration in the extravagant Mexican Churrigueresque style.

Several miles south of Tecoh is the small village of Telchaquillo (tel-chah-KEY-yoh). On the plaza stands a small, plain-looking chapel, and nearby is a cenote (limestone sinkhole) with stone stairs leading down into the water. A short distance south of Telchaquillo is the turn-off (on the right) for the Mayapán Ruins.

About 18 kilometers (11 miles) south of Telchaquillo is a larger village, Tekit (teh-KIT). Tekit's parish church of San Antonio de Padua has a simple altar and elaborately decorated statues of saints. About 7 kilometers (4 miles) south of Tekit is Mamá, another small village dominated by a large church and convent built in the 17th century. The exterior is crowned by lovely decorative stonework; inside are wall frescoes, baroque retablos, recessed wall

niches holding statues of saints and a spectacularly ornate altar.

About 13 kilometers (8 miles) south of Mamá is Teabo (tay-AH-bow), which like other towns in this region is known for the manufacture of the *huipil* dress, the traditional white cotton shift with colorful embroidery around the neckline worn by Yucatecan women. Teabo's 17thcentury Temple of St. Peter the Apostle is part of a complex of colonial buildings. There are beautiful frescoes in the sacristy.

From Teabo, it's another several miles to Maní. It was here in 1562 that Diego de Landa, a Spanish bishop, ordered the destruction by fire of the Mayan codices, or hieroglyphic picture books, believing them profane. The historical loss resulting from this act was incalculable. leaving Landa's own treatise on Mayan history, "Relación de las Cosas de Yucatán" ("Yucatán Before and After the Conquest"), the only known account.

Maní is a quiet, peaceful town that sees little tourist traffic. Visit the town church, which has artwork displaying both Mayan and Spanish influences. The carefully preserved retablos, each replete with red and gold ornamentation, are noteworthy. Be sure to look up at the vaulted ceiling above the gilded gold retablo behind the altar; it is covered with exquisite frescoes. The church's adjacent open-air Indian chapel dates from the late 16th century. The park on the main plaza, complete with the bust of an unidentified Mexican statesman atop a green stone pedestal, is a shady spot to relax.

From Maní continue south to Oxkutzcab (osh-koots-KAHB), located in a fertile farming region that produces sugar cane, tobacco, corn, bananas and citrus fruits. It's a bustling place, with fleets of foot-pedaled triciclos and motorized three-wheeled taxis waiting to pick up passengers.

Oxkutzcab's market, near the main plaza, has stacks of plump green watermelons, wooden crates filled with fruits and vegetables, and vendor stalls in an open-air building with a long, colorful mural extending across the front. Go in the morning, before it gets too hot or crowded, for a Yucatecan breakfast of salbutes—handmade corn tortillas fried and topped with lettuce, chopped tomatoes and shredded chicken. Also on the plaza is the Church and Convent of San Francisco de Asis, which has a tan exterior. Inside this meticulously renovated church are several beautiful *retablos*, the statues of saints surrounded by gold-leaf ornamentation.

From Oxkutzcab, take the Mérida-Chetumal Highway (Mex. 184) north about 19 kilometers (12 miles) to Ticul. This busy regional center specializes in the manufacture of pottery and women's shoes. It's also larger than most of the other towns; the streets are filled with *triciclos* (and dogs).

A domed 18th-century church stands next to Ticul's central plaza. An interesting exterior decoration is the facial features—two half-moon eyes and a nose—carved below the roof. Many of the shops lining the downtown streets sell nothing but shoes. Craft shops offer ceramic bowls, and street vendors hawk embroidered huipiles and Panama hats made from woven palm fronds.

From Ticul continue north on Mex. 184 to Muna, then take Mex. 261 from Muna north to Mérida. From Ticul you also can get to the ruins at Uxmal (see separate listing within this region).

### Celestún

A day trip also is possible to the fishing village of Celestún, on the western Yucatán coast. To get there, take Mex. 281 (Calle 59A within the city) about 97 kilometers (60 miles) west. En route are the towns of Hunucma and Kinchil, as well as fields of henequén and old haciendas that drove this once-thriving industry.

The village sits at the tip of a strip of land separating the Celestún Estuary (ría in Spanish) from the Gulf of Mexico. The atmosphere is decidedly laid-back; there are no resort amenities here. A stretch of white-sand swimming beach is at the north edge of town, although constant winds make the water choppy and silt-laden. The harbor is picturesque in a scruffy sort of way, filled with small boats and fishing nets drying in the sun.

The main reason to visit Celestún is the surrounding wildlife refuge, home to a large colony of flamingos. While these spindly-legged, coral-plumaged birds are the area's most spectacular residents, numerous species of waterfowl also live here. In addition, Celestún is on the flyway of many species migrating from northern climates to South America.

Tours of the estuary can be arranged just past the bridge leading into town, where there is a parking lot, ticket window, restrooms and a snack bar. The fare for a 75-minute tour is about \$45 (U.S.) per boat (cash only), in canopied boats that accommodate up to six passengers. Bring sunscreen and water. The tour includes birdwatching (in addition to flamingos, you're likely to see pelicans, herons, egrets, spoonbills and ducks) as well as an excursion through dense mangroves to a freshwater spring welling up within the saltwater estuary. The number of flamingos seen depends on the season, tide and time of day. Refrain from encouraging your boat captain to get too close, which causes the birds undue stress.

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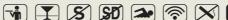
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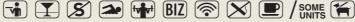












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### PLAYA DEL CARMEN, QUINTANA ROO— See Playa del Carmen, Quintana Roo p. 126.

PUERTO AVENTURAS, QUINTANA ROO— See Puerto Aventuras, Quintana Roo p. 158.

PUERTO MORELOS, QUINTANA ROO— See Puerto Morelos, Quintana Roo p. 159.

# **RÍO BEC, CAMPECHE**

Discovered at the turn of the 20th century, Río Bec (REE-oh bek) is the collective designation for an archeological zone comprising several Mayan sites. All but two are in the state of Campeche. They generally flourished between about A.D. 400 and 1000 and are believed to have served as trade routes between Mayan outposts established along the Caribbean and Gulf of Mexico coasts. The most interesting of these—Kohunlich, Dzibanché, Xpujil, Becan, Chicanná and Calakmul—are all accessible from east-west Mex. 186.

Architecturally the sites exhibit what is referred to as the "Río Bec" style. Features include tower-like structures more visually pleasing than functional and temple entrances carved to look like the open jaws of a snake, dragon or other monstrous creature. These ruins are largely unexplored and little visited, although more and more restoration efforts are being made. What remains intact is the mystery and sense of wonder surrounding these ancient cities.

One or more of the Río Bec sites can easily be visited in the course of a day. As far as staying overnight (highly recommended if you plan on visiting the far-flung Calakmul ruins), there are tourist-class accommodations and a restaurant at the Chicanná Ecovillage Resort, located across the highway from the Chicanná ruins (see attraction listing). The rooms lack air conditioning, but the resort is surprisingly luxurious considering its remote location. Nonguests are welcome to eat at the restaurant; simply tell the guard at the front gate that's what you want to do.

Each archeological site has a parking/entry area and restrooms. Water and food are not available; bring your own. Insect repellent and sturdy shoes are essential for those who plan to do any amount of walking or ruin climbing, which is allowed at all the sites.

**Note:** Mex. 186 is a long, hot route with few services of any kind. ADO operates first-class bus service from Chetumal west to Escárcega and Villahermosa; while the buses may stop at ruins along the way, it is much more convenient to drive your own vehicle. Make sure the car is in good condition and the tank is full (there is a gas station shortly before reaching Xpujil, near the Quintana Roo-Campeche state line). It is strongly recommended that Mex. 186 only be traveled during daylight hours. The sites below are listed based on their distance from Chetumal. One-way drive time (with no stops) from Chetumal to Xpujil is about 90 minutes.

DZIBANCHÉ ruins are about 64 km (40 mi.) w. of Chetumal on Mex. 186 to the well-signed turn-off, then about 19 km (12 mi.) n. of the highway via a paved road. Only open to the public since the mid-1990s, Dzibanché dates to between A.D. 300 and 1200. It receives few visitors despite containing a small but impressive collection of structures. Temples 1 and 6 soar above the wooded site (the ceiba trees that grow here were sacred to the ancient Maya). Just beyond Dzibanché is the smaller Kinichná archeological zone.

**KOHUNLICH** ruins are about 66 km (41 mi.) w. of Chetumal to the signed turn-off (just before the village of Francisco Villa), then about 8 km (5 mi.) s. of the highway via a paved road. Park-like and shady, Kohunlich (koh-hoon-LEECH) may once have been an oasis. The most notable structure among the rubble-strewn mounds is the pyramid-like Temple of the Masks (Templo de Los Mascarones), which has a central stairway flanked with carved faces, strongly Olmec-influenced, that resemble masks. Hints of red are still visible on these figures, which are protected by thatched coverings.

XPUJIL ruins are about 72 km (45 mi.) w. of Kohunlich, on the n. side of the highway just past the village of Xpujil. Xpujil (sh-pooh-HEEL), which means "place of the cattails" in the Mayan language, flourished between A.D. 400 and 900. The largest building at the site consists of three towers that once had steep ornamental stairways extravagantly decorated with jaguar masks; traces of its former grandeur remain.

**BECAN** ruins are about 7 km (4 mi.) w. of Xpujil on the n. side of the highway and can be reached via a short road (watch for the turn-off sign). Surrounded by a dry moat that probably was used as a fortification (the name means "ravine formed by water"), the site once was accessed by seven causeway bridges. This is the most developed of the Río Bec sites and has some of the largest structures, including a twin-towered temple (Structure IX), plazas surrounded by low-rise buildings and a ball court. There also is a nicely preserved stucco mask on display (behind glass) at Structure X.

CHICANNÁ ruins are about 2 km (1.2 mi.) w. of Becán on the s. side of the highway; a short road leads to the site.



They stand within an enticing grove of tropical trees and other vegetation. The buildings are a mix of Río Bec and Chenes architectural styles. Most notable is Structure II, which stands in the main plaza. It features elaborate carvings and a huge doorway fashioned after the laws of a monster's open mouth, complete with stone teeth. Other buildings include a twin-towered temple and Structure XX. which also has a monster mouth doorway.

CALAKMUL ruins are a good 2-hour drive w. of Chicanná; from the Mex. 186 turn-off (watch for signs), a long, narrow paved road proceeds s. about 60 km (37 mi.) into the Calakmul Biosphere Reserve. This huge archeological zone—a UNESCO World Heritage Site—is in southern Campeche about 20 miles from the Guatemala border. For those with a vested interest in Mayan history—or who relish the opportunity to explore an isolated yet beautiful site free of crowds—it's worth the effort and time.

Calakmul played a key role in the region's history for centuries and at its height, from about 500 to 800 A.D., had about 50,000 inhabitants and consisted of more than 6,500 structures. Calakmul and nearby Tikal were rival city-states.

One of the largest Mayan cities ever discovered, Calakmul is rich with building platforms, excavated structures and stelae (tall, sculpted stone slabs that functioned as grave markers or monuments). It also boasts one of the largest pyramids in Mexico, Structure 2, which is more than 150 feet tall and has a base of 390 feet. A museum located on the way to the entrance has exhibits about the archeological zone and the biosphere reserve. Note: Allow a full day to explore; since an early start is recommended, it's advisable to spend the night at a property close by. Since the site is large and complex, a downloadable map will come in handy.

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# **TULUM, QUINTANA ROO—**

See Tulum, Quintana Roo p. 164.

# **UXMAL. YUCATÁN**

If Chichén Itzá is considered the Yucatán Peninsula's most impressive archeological site, Uxmal (oosh-MAHL) is the most beautiful. Unlike the structures at Chichén Itzá, with their Toltec-influenced images of violent conquest, Uxmal's architecture is more purely Mayan, with richly ornamented stone facades and a majestic pyramid.

The ruins were designated a World Heritage Site by UNESCO in 1996; don't miss them.

Uxmal rose to prominence concurrently with the great civilizations at Palenque (in the state of Chiapas) and Tikal (in Guatemala), flourishing between A.D. 600 and 1000. Little is known about its history. The name means "thrice built" in Maya, although it was actually reconstructed five times, suggesting that drought forced abandonment followed by resettlement. The subsequent importance of Chichén Itzá and the increased intermingling of Mayan cultures with those from the central Mexican highlands were likely contributors to the city's decline, which appeared to be complete by the 14th century.

Please refer to pages 10-11 for Inspected Clean details.

The first excavations were begun in 1929 by Danish archeologist and explorer Frans Blom, who also conducted research at other Mayan archeological sites. The Mexican government has since worked with a number of archeologists to reconstruct the site, and the main buildings have all been restored.

Uxmal is the defining example of the Puuc architectural style (the name refers to the region's hilly terrain), which emphasized elegant, horizontal proportions and intricately detailed building exteriors of cut stones assembled in geometric patterns. Cornices and entryways often feature beak-nosed representations of the rain god Chac. The detail of the stonework is even more amazing when one considers that the Maya created their buildings without benefit of metal tools.

This part of the peninsula has a hot climate with seasonal precipitation and is subject to prolonged dry spells. Unlike other Mayan cities, Uxmal did not have ready availability to a source of water. Instead, they depended upon the *chultun* (a man-made cistern) to collect precious rain.

Visitors enter the site via a short path that begins at the visitor center. The first building is immediately evident: The Pyramid of the Magician (see attraction listing). This structure probably functioned as a ceremonial building where Uxmal's rulers were crowned.

The Nunnery (see attraction listing), named by the Spaniards, was probably used by Uxmal's elite ruling class. Just south of the Nunnery is a ball court, smaller and simpler than the one at Chichén Itzá. South of the ball court is the small, classically designed House of the Turtles (Casa de las Tortugas), named for the border of turtles carved along its upper molding. Stand on the south side of this temple and look through the central doorway (of three) for a nicely framed view of the Nunnery.

The Governor's Palace (see attraction listing) was most likely Uxmal's administrative center and may also have served an astrological purpose; it faces east while the other buildings face west, perhaps to better sight the planet Venus, which the Maya associated with war. From this elevated vantage point there is an expansive view of the Nunnery and the Pyramid of the Magician.

The Great Pyramid, partially restored, is just southwest of the Governor's Palace. Originally terraced with nine levels, it is topped by a palace decorated with Chac masks and bird carvings that probably represent parrots. The climb to the palace level is steep but doable (be particularly careful descending if you're prone to vertigo), with sweeping views of the surrounding jungle scrub.

Just west of the Great Pyramid are the remains of a building called the Dovecote because its lattice design somewhat resembles a bird nesting house. The view of this ruin is particularly fine from the summit of the Great Pyramid.

Other buildings at the site are only partially reconstructed, or unexcavated mounds hidden in the brush. The House of the Old Woman (Casa de la Vieja), an old, ruined pyramidal structure southeast of the Great Pyramid, is reached by an overgrown path. Further southeast is the Temple of the Phalli, another ruined structure with phallic-shaped sculptures along the cornices, presumably to divert and collect rainwater from the roof.

#### **General Information and Activities**

Mérida is the most convenient base from which to explore the Puuc region. Gray Line tours offers two packages: a day tour of Uxmal and the nearby Kabah archeological site that departs at 9 a.m., and a two-day tour of Uxmal that departs at 9 a.m. and includes the evening sound-and-light show and an overnight hotel stay. Both tours include round-trip transportation, guide service and meals. For reservation information phone (998) 887-9162 (in Mexico) or (800) 472-9546 (from the United States). Tour groups usually have access to a swimming pool; bring a suit and towel, as they aren't provided.

Uxmal is about 80 kilometers (50 miles) south of Mérida via Mex. 261. If driving, take Avenida Itzaes (Mex. 180) south from downtown Mérida past the airport to the Anillo Periférico (loop road) and the junction with Mex. 261.

Newer highway construction gives motorists the option of bypassing Umán, Yaxcopoil, Muna and other villages en route to Uxmal. This cuts some time off the trip, which takes about an hour from Mérida. If you want to experience rural Yucatán take old Mex. 261, which runs through largely undeveloped scrub country. Muna is a typical Yucatecan small town that has thatch-roofed stone dwellings and a large Franciscan church.

For those who want to spend the night near the ruins, there are AAA Diamond designated lodgings along Mex. 261 near the site entrance. For budget-minded travelers the nearby town of Ticul, about a 15-minute drive from Uxmal, offers very basic motels.

Guide fees are posted on a board next to the ticket window. Although you don't need a guide to appreciate the architecture, and the information may be embellished with fanciful details, a guide's general knowledge will be helpful to those unfamiliar with Mayan history. The main buildings have informational plagues in English, Spanish and Maya. Plan on spending half a day at the ruins if not part of an organized tour group, or devote a full day to see Uxmal and the other sites along the "Puuc Trail."

A 45-minute sound-and-light show is presented nightly from a vantage point overlooking the Nunnery guadrangle.



Colored lights, recorded symphonic music under the stars and melodramatic narration provide an appropriate backdrop for Mayan legends. Although the "history" can be taken with a grain of salt, the artificial lighting illuminates architectural details that are missed under sharp sunlight. The narration is in Spanish, but headsets offering the show in several languages (including English) can be rented.

Most of the site is unshaded; bring a hat or other headgear for protection from the strong sun. An early start will allow you to beat not only the heat but the tour bus crowds that begin arriving before noon. Comfortable, nonslip walking shoes are a must if you plan to do any climbing. It's also a good idea to bring bottled water and insect repellent (particularly if you're attending the soundand-light show).

The visitor center at the entrance has very clean restrooms, a bookstore, first-aid station, gift shop, coffee shop, casual restaurant and convenience store. A few souvenir and T-shirt stands set up next to the visitor center parking lot. Uxmal is open daily 8-5. The sound-and-light show begins at 7 or 8 p.m., depending on the season. Site admission 207 pesos. Sound-and-light show 86 pesos. Parking fee 20 pesos. Video camera fee 50 pesos.

**GOVERNOR'S PALACE** is s. of the Nunnery and just s.e. of the House of the Turtles. This building is widely considered to be among the finest Mayan architectural achievements. The low, narrow structure, more than 300 feet long, is built on three levels. Its upper facade is covered with intricately carved stone figures and geometric designs. Serpents, masks and mosaic patterns all blend into a beautifully harmonious whole. Stand back from the palace's eastern side to discern the 103 stone carvings of Chac that together form the image of an undulating serpent (dramatically illuminated during the sound-and-light show).

NUNNERY (Casa de las Monjas) faces the western stairway of the Pyramid of the Magician. Get thee to these long, low buildings that surround a large guadrangle and stand in the center of the courtyard to appreciate the overall harmony that prevails, even though the structure is terraced and on different levels. The exteriors of each wing have beautiful decorative details, including stone masks of Chac (recognized by their elongated noses), entwined serpents, mosaic patterns and latticework designs. The southern wing has an arched entryway, once the complex's main entrance.

**PYRAMID OF THE MAGICIAN** is near the site entrance. Also called The Sorcerer (Templo El Adivino), this impressive structure is both taller (some 125 feet) and steeper than El Castillo, the pyramid at Chichén Itzá. It actually contains five superimposed layers that correspond to Uxmal's five separate periods of construction. The walls are

rounded rather than sharply angular, an unusual feature. Stairways ascend the eastern and western sides. The western stairway is very steep (a 60-degree angle); the eastern stairway is not quite as steep. Climbing the pyramid is not permitted.

CHOCOLATE MUSEUM (Choco-Story México) is just off Mex. 261, across the road from the Uxmal Ruins. This open-air museum, on the grounds of a cacao plantation, showcases the history of cacao production in the Yucatán region. After passing through the neo-colonial entrance building, visitors walk along a trail where thatched palapas contain exhibits about cacao's sacred link to the Mayan people and a more general overview of chocolate production. Background information is in both Spanish and English.

Along with demonstrations of how the dried and fermented fatty seed of the cacao tree-one of the fundamental building blocks in the creation of chocolate—is processed, visitors can sample a traditional Mayan drink made from organic cocoa and spices that is not the sweet beverage one might expect. A re-enactment of a traditional Mayan ceremony is also presented. The lovely grounds feature a variety of orchids and labeled plants as well as habitats for spider monkeys and jaquars rescued from the wild.

Bus transportation via ADO (the Puuc Route bus) departs Fri.-Sun. at 8 a.m. from the Union Terminal in downtown Mérida, at Calle 69 #554 (between calles 68 and 70). Time: Allow 1 hour, 30 minutes minimum. Phone: (999) 192-5385 (cell number; in Mexico dial 045 before the number). [\|\|

# **Nearby Puuc Ruins**

For true aficionados of Mayan history and culture, a full day can be spent exploring the ruins along the Puuc Route south and east of Uxmal, all within easy driving distance. Bus service visits these small archeological sites. but driving allows you to see them at your own pace. Roadside services are minimal, so make sure your gas tank is full and bring food, water, insect repellent and comfortable, nonslip walking shoes. The following sites are listed in order of location from Uxmal.

KABAH is about 19 km (12 mi.) s. on Mex. 261; park in the small dirt lot on the e. (left) side of the road. Although small—there are only two main buildings—it is well worth visiting to see the lavishly decorated Palace of the Masks. or Codz-Pop (in Maya, "rolled mat"). Its entire west exterior is emblazoned with elaborately carved stone masks of the rain god Chac. The busy architectural style reflects the ornate Chenes influence, which is not often seen in this region.

As amazing as the front is, make sure you walk around to the back (east) side. There are no Chac masks here, but jutting off the upper facade are the sculptures of two warriors who seem to be guarding the palace. Below them on one of the side panels (at ground level) are bas-reliefs depicting one warrior subjugating another in classic Mayan fashion.

The other major building on this side of the road is the well-restored Palace (El Palacio), built on two levels, which features a Puuc-style colonnaded facade. Across Mex. 261 is the Great Temple, a large conical mound rising above the thick scrub. It is only partially restored. Beyond the Great Temple is a freestanding arch marking the spot where a Mayan *sacbe* (limestone causeway) road once entered Kabah from Uxmal; compare it to the one at Labná.

**SAYIL** is about 5 km (3 mi.) from Kabah; take Mex. 261 to the junction with Mex. 184 (the road to Oxkutzcab), then e. about 4 km (2.5 mi.) to the ruins. The aptly named site, which means "place of ants," contains several hundred known structures, almost all on the south side of the road. There is one standout: the Palace (El Palacio), a grand three-level building more than 200 feet long. The second level features rows of Grecian-style columns as well as a profusion of stone carvings. Most are of the rain god Chac, but there are additional depictions of an upside-down "diving god."

Most of the other buildings are in ruins or obscured by jungle. South of the Palace is El Mirador, a small temple, and beyond it a primitive stele (carved stone). Also at this site are a number of man-made cisterns that were built to catch seasonal rainfall.

**XLAPAK** is about 6 km (3.5 mi.) e. of Sayil. Xlapak (shla-PAHK) means "old walls" in Maya. The notable structure at this small site on the south side of the road is the partially restored Palace of Xlapak, which is decorated with Chac masks, some flaunting curled noses. The restored portions are lighter in tone than the weathered, unrestored sections.

**LABNÁ** is about 3 km (2 mi.) e. of Xlapak. Here the bestknown ruin is a restored, freestanding stone arch larger than the one at Kabah. It displays ornate decoration on the west side and a more geometric pattern on the east side. Pass through the arch to El Mirador, a pyramidal structure resting on a pile of rubble. Labná, like Sayil, contains the remains of many *chultunes* (cisterns) that collected rainwater.

Labná's impressive Palace building is similar to the one at Sayil, although not in as good condition. See it for the ornamentation, which is—as on so many Mayan buildings—bizarrely imaginative.

LOLTÚN CAVES (Grutas de Loltún) are about 6 km (10 mi.) s.w. of Oxkutzcab via the Sayil-Labná road. The entrance to the caves is reached from a gravel path that branches off the n. side of the road; the turn-off is not signed. Hieroglyphic inscriptions and carvings of flowers on the cave walls are estimated to be some 1,000 years old; the name, loosely translated, means "one flower in the stone." Throughout the caves are *chultunes* (cisterns), stone troughs which were placed to collect water dripping from the roof. Natural formations include giant stalactites and stalagmites that emit an echoing hum when struck.

The caverns can be seen by guided tour only. Tours are given daily at 9:30, 12:30 and 3:30; double-check this schedule at the Uxmal visitor center. Some passages are dark and the paths may be slippery or steep; wear comfortable, nonslip walking shoes. Most tours are given in Spanish; ask at the front ticket office regarding the availability of an English-speaking guide.

# VALLADOLID, YUCATÁN

Valladolid (vah-yah-doh-LEED) was founded in 1543 by Francisco de Montejo, who established Spanish rule over much of the Yucatán Peninsula. The Spaniards constructed their churches over the site of a former Mayan town, Zací. Many revolts occurred in this region during the mid-19th-century War of the Castes, when rebellious and oppressed descendants of the Maya clashed with privileged landowners. Here too was one of the first uprisings against dictator Porfirio Díaz, which foreshadowed the Mexican Revolution of 1910.

The commercial center for an agricultural district, Valladolid is on Mex. 180; there is also an exit off toll highway Mex. 180-D. A colonial atmosphere, somewhat gone to seed, pervades this unpretentious market town. Old buildings still bear weathered Spanish coats of arms above their doorways. The main plaza is bounded by calles 39, 40, 41 and 42; here visitors can browse among shops selling leather goods or sit on one of the curved stone benches and observe the local scene.

Several kilometers north of Valladolid on Mex. 295, on the way to the Ek Balam ruins (see attraction listing) is the little village of Temozón. It's worth stopping here for a look at the beautifully weathered church that dates from the early 18th century. The small plaza in front makes a good photo opportunity.

The ruins themselves are the most noteworthy attraction in the Valladolid vicinity. Ongoing restoration work at this archeological site deep in the jungle began in 1997. Still primitive, Ek Balam receives relatively few visitors and

thus retains more of a sense of mystery than other Yucatán ruins.

EK BALAM is about 15 km (9 mi.) n. of the Mex. 180-D Valladolid exit via Mex. 295, following signs. To get there from Valladolid, take Calle 40 out of town to Mex. 295 and proceed n. about 18 km (11 mi.) to the Ek Balam turn-off (watch for the sign marking the turn-off). Archeologists believe the site achieved its greatest prominence sometime between A.D. 400 and 900; the name Ek Balam means "black jaguar."

Stony, muddy walkways connect ruins unusual in the fact that the buildings have round corners where there are normally sharp right angles. Structure 1 (known as the Acropolis) dominates the main plaza. About 100 feet tall, this enormous pyramid has steep stairs that can be climbed for fantastic views of the surrounding area. Thatched roofs protect statues and carvings on the different levels.

About two-thirds of the way up is the recently uncovered tomb of Ukit Kan Lek Tok, one of Ek Balam's rulers. The opening, designed to look like a stylized jaguar head, is flanked by stucco sculptures of winged warriors intriguingly reminiscent of angels. Decorative features include skulls, a doorway lined with "teeth" and a wall covered with intricate carvings.

Smaller edifices surround the base of the main pyramid. Large thatched roofs protecting new excavation sites provide welcome shade. At the entrance is a restored Puucstyle gateway arch that once was connected to an ancient road, or sacbe (sock bay); the Maya built these slightly raised roads of limestone gravel to connect their cities.

There are restrooms in the ticket building. Wear comfortable walking shoes and bring drinking water. The small village of Ek Balam, just before the entrance to the ruins, is a good place to stop for cold refreshments. Time: Allow 2 hours minimum.

RÍO LAGARTOS NATIONAL PARK (Reserva de la Biósfera Río Lagartos) is about 100 km (62 mi.) almost due n. of Valladolid at the end of Mex. 295 to the fishing village of Río Lagartos. Mexico's largest flamingo sanctuary comprises some 120,000 acres of protected mangrove swamps, sand dunes, mud flats and shallow estuaries along the Yucatán Peninsula's northern coast. In addition to flamingos, the park is home to herons, egrets, roseate spoonbills, anhingas, ducks, pelicans and many other bird species.

Village-based Rio Lagartos Adventures offers 2-hour flamingo boat tours that depart from the Ria Maya Restaurant (on Calle 19 on the waterfront). The launch is captained by an experienced guide who takes passengers to flamingo feeding grounds, pointing out other bird species and the occasional crocodile along the way. The excursion includes a stop at the Los Coloradas salt ponds and the option to indulge in a reputedly therapeutic white clay mud bath or go for a swim at a nearby beach.

The best times to observe flamingos are in the morning or late afternoon. Birdwatching, fly-fishing, nature photography and crocodile nighttime observation trips also are offered. English-speaking guides are available.

Note: The topes (speed bumps) along Mex. 295 can significantly damage the underside of a vehicle if negotiated at too fast a speed. **Phone:** (986) 862-0452.

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# Baja California

n 1535 a shipwreck survivor regaled Hernando Cortés with reports of an island populated by Amazonian women and brimming with gold and pearls. The *conquistador*, believing it to be the fabled land of California, set sail for the elongated peninsula known as Baja (Lower) California with three galleons and 600 prospective settlers.

Cortés landed near the present site of La Paz, toward the peninsula's southern end. Finding neither pearls, gold nor Amazons—but encountering impoverished land and fierce Indians—Cortés abandoned the area. And the Spanish, busy plundering other parts of Mexico, all but forgot Baja. It was not until 1697 that a permanent settlement was established, a Jesuit mission and presidio at Loreto.

Except for border town Tijuana and seaside Ensenada, Baja for the most part remained a lonely outpost for hardy fishermen through the first half of the 20th century. But in 1974 Mex. 1, the Transpeninsular Highway, opened the more far-flung parts of the peninsula to visitors.

Nearly 800 miles in length and varying from about 30 to 110 miles in width, the Baja Peninsula extends south from the U.S. border like a giant appendage paralleling the northwestern Mexican mainland. It broke off millions of



years ago, in the process creating the Gulf of California (also known as the Sea of Cortez). The gulf and Pacific coastlines are indented by an endless string of bays and coves, with many islands scattered offshore. Both bodies of water are home to an amazing variety of fish, making the peninsula a sport-fishing paradise.

The state of Baja California, comprising all territory north of the 28th parallel, consists mostly of rugged mountains or harsh desert, although irrigation of the hot, arid valleys around the border city of Mexicali has turned them into a productive agricultural region. Day trippers, the partying college crowd and souvenir hunters trek across the border to Tijuana. The port of Ensenada is a cruise ship stop and weekend destination. Between the two is casual hangout Rosarito Beach.

The state of Baja California Sur, occupying the southern portion of the peninsula, is even more barren. Occasional oases such as the village of San Ignacio, a mirage of date palms and pastel-colored buildings, pop up in the middle of the desert. Toward the peninsula's end is La Paz, the capital and a traditionally Mexican city.

At Baja's dramatically beautiful southern tip is its most popular vacation spot, and one of Mexico's most popular destinations. Los Cabos (the Capes) refers to the twin resort towns of Cabo San Lucas and San José del Cabo, full of championship golf courses and pricey all-inclusive

Vagabundos Del Mar RV, Boat and Travel provides assistance to RV travelers in Baja. Services include roadside aid, RV park information, insurance needs, and medical air services and evacuation. For information phone (800) 474-2252 (from the United States).

AAA recommends that travelers consult online U.S. State Department travel advisories when planning traveling abroad. Find this information at travel.state.gov/ content/passports/en/country/mexico.html.

# CABO SAN LUCAS, BAJA CALIFORNIA SUR

Prior to the 1970s, Cabo San Lucas was an isolated community known mostly to sport fishermen, and nearby San José del Cabo was just a sleepy provincial village. Then FONATUR (Fondo Nacional de Fomento al Turismo), an agency that promotes Mexican tourism, selected the end of the line of the Baja Peninsula as its next large-scale development project. It was a natural choice: Cabo San Lucas' setting at "Land's End," Baja's very southern tip, is the dramatically scenic spot where the Pacific Ocean meets the Gulf of California, and San José del Cabo had more or less retained the picturesque appeal of an old Mexican town.

Collectively known as "Los Cabos," Cabo San Lucas and the nearby city of San José del Cabo are connected by a 30-kilometer (20-mile), four-lane divided highway locally referred to as "the Corridor." This stretch of highway has developed into its own destination. The wild, rocky landscapes along The Corridor once hid only secluded fishing lodges and a few hotels. Now the views of rugged cliffs and the glimpses of steely blue gulf water and whitesand beaches are punctuated by a string of lushly groomed and lavishly appointed resorts. The Corridor also is where you'll find Cabo's championship golf courses. The resort communities of Cabo Real and Cabo del Sol are centers of tourist-oriented development.

#### **Practicalities**

The Cabo San Lucas airport—Los Cabos International Airport—is about 13 kilometers (8 miles) north of San José del Cabo and 48 kilometers (30 miles) northeast of Cabo San Lucas. Alaska, American, Southwest and United airlines offer flights to the Cabo San Lucas airport from U.S. West Coast cities. American and Delta provide service from U.S. East Coast cities, with most connecting flights via Atlanta, Dallas or Houston. Contact your AAA travel advisor or check the AAA website to find cheap airline flights and affordable vacation packages. For additional information about airlines see Arriving by Air, page p. 28.

Note: Timeshare sellers bombard arriving visitors; unless you're really interested in spending 4 hours enduring an aggressive sales pitch for a new condominium development, the lure of free lunches and drinks or so-called discounted activities is definitely not worth it.

A private taxi from the airport to your hotel will be very expensive; a trip to San José del Cabo can cost up to \$60 (U.S.), while fares to Cabo San Lucas can reach \$90 and beyond. Returning to the airport via private taxi is slightly cheaper. Rates from San José are in the \$30 to \$35 (U.S.) range; from Cabo San Lucas prepare to shell out \$50 to \$60.

Services like Los Cabos Express and SuperShuttle provide round-trip private sedan or SUV and shared-ride van transportation between the airport and hotels; rates vary based on the destination. For additional SuperShuttle information or to make reservations, phone (800) 258-3826.

If you arrive at the airport without a reservation, look for the green-and-white Los Cabos Express bus, which is usually parked outside the terminal; buy your ticket from the driver. One-way rates average \$16-\$18. Another less expensive option than a cab is an airport transfer, which some hotels offer for a fee; inquire about this service when you make your travel reservations.

Because the Los Cabos area is spread out and expensive taxi fares will quickly add up, renting a car is a viable option if you're staying more than a few days or want to explore the surrounding area. If you only want a car for a

day or two, consider renting one in town at the end of your trip and dropping it at the airport on your departure day. The car rental company's one-way drop-off fee will usually be cheaper than a taxi ride back to the airport.

If you've rented a car at the airport upon arrival and want to bypass the stoplights and frequently heavy traffic on Mex. 1, take the Los Cabos Airport-San José del Cabo toll road. This four-lane highway departs the airport (watch for signs) and continues about 20 kilometers (12 miles) to San José del Cabo, where it terminates at Mex. 1, just west of the waterfront hotel zone. The toll booth is at the southern end of the road; the toll is around 65 pesos. To reach Cabo San Lucas, just continue southwest on Mex. 1. There are no gas stations along the toll road.

**Note:** AAA members enjoy discounts through Hertz for car rentals in Cabo San Lucas booked in the United States. Consult your local AAA club to add a car rental to your travel package or phone Hertz, (800) 654-3080. There is a Hertz counter in the airport terminal. For additional information about renting a car see Car Rentals, page p. 29.

It's a long drive to Los Cabos from the border at Tijuana—some 1,050 miles via Mex. 1 (also called the Carretera Transpeninsular). From La Paz, the quicker and less winding route to Cabo San Lucas is Mex. 1 south to the junction with Mex. 19, then Mex. 19 south through Todos Santos to Cabo San Lucas.

Except for the four-lane Corridor (the stretch of Mex. 1 between San José del Cabo and Cabo San Lucas) and four-lane Mex. 1-D from Tijuana to Ensenada, Mex. 1 is a two-lane road running through frequent desolate stretches. Gas stations and traveler facilities can be few and far between. A temporary vehicle importation permit is not required anywhere on the peninsula, unless the vehicle is put on a ferry bound for the mainland.

Mex. 1 is narrow compared to highways in the United States and Canada, and road shoulders are nonexistent along many stretches. Road quality is generally good, but watch for potholes along some stretches. Avoid driving at an excessive speed (above 50 mph), and do not drive after dark. This and other roads are not lit at night, and livestock standing on the road poses an ever-present hazard. Streams (called *arroyos*) are subject to flash floods during infrequent storms. Flooding, although rare, can make vehicle travel impossible when it occurs. Elevated bridges have solved this problem along the Corridor.

Baja's main overland bus line, Autotransportes de Baja California (ABC), travels from Tijuana to La Paz; the trip (including stops en route) takes about 22 hours. The ABC bus station in Tijuana is adjacent to Plaza Viva Tijuana (a 5- to 10-minute walk from the border).

From La Paz, the Aguila/Peninsular bus line provides regular service to Cabo San Lucas, San José del Cabo

and the airport. The fare to Cabo San Lucas or San José del Cabo is around 300 to 360 pesos. The trip takes about 3 hours.

Greyhound buses take passengers from the Greyhound terminal at 120 W. Broadway in downtown San Diego to Tijuana's Central Bus Terminal (Centro de Autobuses) in La Mesa; for fare and schedule information phone (800) 231-2222 (from the United States). You'll need a valid tourist permit in order to cross the border.

Taxis from Cabo San Lucas to San José del Cabo or the Corridor hotels are convenient but expensive, averaging \$25-\$30 or more depending on destination; the local Suburcabos buses are a much cheaper alternative. The blue-and-red buses run daily between the two Cabos. The main stop in Cabo San Lucas is near the Puerto Paraiso mall, on the same side of the street. In San José del Cabo the main stop is near the turnoff to the airport, in front of the Mega grocery store. The fare for the 45-minute trip is 33 pesos.

The Aguila bus line provides service from Cabo San Lucas to San José del Cabo and also to Todos Santos. The central bus station (Terminal Central Cabo San Lucas Aguila) is near the junction of Avenida Reforma and Boulevard Hidalgo (Mex. 19, the road to Todos Santos). For additional information about buses see Bus Service, page p. 36.

Currency can be exchanged at banks during normal Mon.-Fri. business hours, but make sure this service is offered before getting in line. *Casas de cambio* (currency exchange offices) are another option; the exchange rate may not be as favorable, but they're more convenient. ATMs are plentiful, and some dispense dollars in addition to pesos. Avoid using an ATM after dark.

As in other parts of Mexico, making phone calls from your hotel room, calling collect or using a credit card can all end up being prohibitively expensive. If you don't have a cellphone, prepaid Ladatel/Telmex calling cards (available in various denominations at mini markets, pharmacies and other local businesses) offer relatively low perminute rates and can be used at any public phone marked "Telmex" or "Ladatel." Avoid phones displaying the message "To call long distance to the USA and Canada, simply dial 0"; the charge will be very high.

If you need to use the internet, stop by the Cabo Coffee Co., at the corner of Avenida Madero and Calle Hidalgo (across the street from Plaza Amelia Wilkes, the main square). It serves coffee made from organically grown Mexican beans.

In case of emergency dial 911 to reach local police, the fire department or the Red Cross. The AmeriMed Cabo San Lucas Hospital, on Boulevard Lázaro Cárdenas near the Bancomer bank branch and a McDonald's, offers a

wide range of routine and emergency services and has a 24-hour pharmacy. Insurance is required for medical emergencies; phone (624) 105-8500.

To contact the municipal police, phone (624) 143-3977. The Red Cross (Cruz Roja) is on Boulevard Hidalgo at Calle Constituyentes/Avenida Reforma (Mex. 19 Km marker 221, on the way to Todos Santos); phone (624) 143-3300. An ability to speak fluent Spanish will come in handy.

As for Cabo San Lucas weather, temperatures are warm all year. Daytime highs are around 80 degrees in winter but can soar to over 100 during the summer months; bring plenty of sunscreen. The Gulf of California waters warm well into the 80s in summer and are close to 80 degrees the rest of the year, making conditions for diving and snorkeling ideal. The Pacific Ocean is about 10 degrees cooler. The high tourist season runs from November through April; bring a sweater for occasional cool evenings if visiting in January or February.

Although the climate is arid, the tip of the Baja Peninsula is not immune from tropical storms or hurricanes. In September 2014 Category 3 Hurricane Odile pummeled the Los Cabos area, causing widespread damage to hotels, buildings and beaches along the Mex. 1 Corridor. Recovery was swift, however, and by spring 2015 most hotels and tourism-related services had resumed normal operations.

# City Layout

Despite the popularity of Cabo San Lucas' all-exclusive resorts and high-end hotels. Cabo San Lucas is still a small town at heart. It spreads north and west from Cabo San Lucas Bay (Bahía de Cabo San Lucas). The main street is Avenida Lázaro Cárdenas, the westward extension of Mex. 1. Boulevard Marina branches off it, curves around the harbor and leads to a few beachfront hotels located beyond downtown. Popular things to do in Cabo San Lucas are clustered around the harbor; the streets in the vicinity of Plaza Amelia Wilkes, the central square; and along the Mex. 1 Corridor.

Downtown Cabo lends itself to strolling. The shopping centers, restaurants and nightspots along Boulevard Marina and on the surrounding streets can all be easily reached on foot. In addition, a pedestrian walkway (malecón) wraps around the large Cabo San Lucas Marina, packed with everything from humble pangas to luxury yachts. The harbor *malecón* can be traversed in about an hour and the people-watching is always interesting.

Stop by the sport-fishing docks at the harbor's southern end in late afternoon, when local boats return from a day's fishing, for a firsthand look at the many game varieties found in the surrounding waters. If you're driving in from one of the Corridor hotels, there is a large parking lot off Boulevard Marina, next to the Plaza Nautica shopping center.

#### **Beaches**

The beaches of southern Baja are renowned for their beauty as well as their tranquility. The scenery is magnificent: intensely blue water, a backdrop of mountains and rugged cliffs, stands of huge cacti. It's still not all that difficult for solitude seekers and those on vacation to find a secluded beach and spend the day picnicking, surfing or snorkeling without crowds.

You will, however, need a car for exploring Cabo San Lucas beaches. With the exception of Medano Beach, private taxi rides to and from the Corridor beaches are expensive. Public bus transportation is an option and drivers will generally let you disembark at beach turn-offs. However, walking from the highway to the beaches themselves often involves a long trek without any shade (i.e., miserably hot).

Cabo's most popular sunbathing spot is Medano Beach (Playa El Medano), which curves gracefully along the shore of Cabo San Lucas Bay just north of town and encompasses the beachfront hotel zone. The water here is usually safe for swimming, the sand is soft, and peoplewatching from the outdoor bars and local restaurants lining the beach is always entertaining.

Cruise ships anchor just off shore. Parasailers soar overhead. Beach vendors trudge through the sand. Catamarans, sea kayaks and pangas ply the bay. Rowdy co-eds rent wave runners and other water toys. To reach the beach from Avenida Lázaro Cárdenas, head south on Paseo de Pescador. During college spring break weeks Medano's raucous beachfront bars are party central.

Land's End (see attraction listing), or "Finisterra," is literally that—the tip of the Baja California Peninsula. Both the approach to Cabo San Lucas via Mex. 1 and elevated spots in town offer panoramic views of Baja's final frontier. Some of the beaches in this area, however, are accessible only by boat.

Located just west of Land's End, Lover's Beach (Playa del Amor) may well be the most idyllic, although it's almost always crowded unless you arrive early in the day. A water taxi can be hired either at Medano Beach or the Cabo San Lucas marina to take you to the beach, drop you off and then return at a predetermined time; bring along drinking water and a lunch. Swimming and snorkeling are usually safe along the cove that faces the Gulf of California side, although the water can occasionally get a bit rough.

At Lover's Beach it's also possible to walk coast to coast—literally and in a matter of minutes. From the gulf shore, the sand extends across the cape to another beach facing the Pacific Ocean. Known as Divorce Beach, this stretch's white sand is great for strolling or beachcombing, but crashing waves and strong rip currents make swimming dangerous.

Solmar Beach (Playa Solmar) is a wide stretch of sand running west from the rocks at Land's End. Several large hotels, including the Grand Solmar resort, the Hotel Finisterra, the Terra Sol Beach Resort and the Playa Grande Resort, front this beach. The powerful Pacific undertow and currents make swimming here dangerous as well, but the views are spectacular.

Land's End is noted for two dramatic rock formations sculpted by the elements. El Arco, Cabo's signature landmark, is the famous natural rock arch of Cabo San Lucas featured on everything from tourist brochures to souvenir shot glasses. The other photogenic formations here are the pinnacles of The Friars (Los Frailes)—chiseled granite formations shaped like hooded monks. Deep blue water surrounds them at Land's End, a point where the Gulf of California mingles with the mighty Pacific.

For close-up views of El Arco you'll need to hit the water. Everything from water taxis and kayak tours to booze cruises and glass-bottom boats make the short trip from either Medano Beach or the Cabo San Lucas marina. Glass-bottom boat tours last an hour, cost about \$15 (U.S.) per person and depart from the docks at the far southern end of the marina. You'll find ticket booths along the *malecón*.

If you have a car, the Gulf of California coast between Cabo San Lucas and San José del Cabo is sprinkled with surfing areas, hidden beaches and secluded little coves that can be explored. Turn-offs branching off the Corridor (Mex. 1), some no more than dirt paths, lead to these spots. Generally these beaches are not considered safe for swimming (there are no lifeguards, for one thing), but they offer excellent snorkeling and diving opportunities. Heading northeast on Mex. 1 from Cabo San Lucas toward San José del Cabo, here are a few worth visiting.

Shipwreck Beach (Playa Barco Varado) is at Km 11, about 7 miles north of downtown Cabo. It's a long drive from the highway to the entrance of the Cabo del Sol resort development; access to the beach is via the southwest side of the Sheraton Hacienda del Mar Golf & Spa Resort (follow the signs). The beach is named for a Japanese tuna boat that ran aground in the 1960s; until recently the rusted hulk still remained on the rocks. providing golfers at Cabo del Sol's Ocean Course with a spectacular backdrop on the last few holes. There are tide pools to explore and swimming in the surf is possible, although not recommended for young children due to waves and occasional rough conditions.

Widow's Beach (Playa las Viudas) also is known as Twin Dolphin Beach because of its location near the nowdemolished Hotel Twin Dolphin. Swimming is usually good at this series of scalloped, coarse sand beaches separated by rocky outcroppings. When the surf's up, however, the pounding shore break will surely finish you off. But the wild beauty of Viudas make it a worthwhile stop at any time, regardless of ocean conditions. The turn-off for the unpaved beach access road (signed "Acceso a la Playa") is just past the Km 12 marker.

Snorkelers are drawn to Playa Santa Maria, a picturesque horseshoe-shaped bay endowed with colorful underwater scenery. Around mid-day tour boats arrive at the cove, blasting high-decibel party music and dispensing pods of snorkelers. In other words, it's best to visit in the morning or late afternoon. There are no snack bars, so pack a cooler. Shade is nonexistent, but roving umbrella rental boys will set you up for a few pesos. The signed beach turn-off is on Mex. 1 just past Playa la Viudas. Parking is available in a "guarded" lot near the highway, or farther down the dirt road at the beach itself.

Chileno Bay, about 14 kilometers (9 miles) northeast, is one of the most beautiful areas along the Los Cabos coast, and a prime destination for swimming, snorkeling, scuba and other things to do. A gorgeous bay backed by rocky bluffs, Playa Chileno caters to civilized beachgoers with bathrooms, showers and a booth renting snorkel equipment. The Mex. 1 Chileno turn-off is clearly signed "Chileno Bay Playa Público"; a paved road leads down to a free parking lot.

Playa Palmilla, about 27 kilometers (17 miles) northeast, is near the luxurious, long-established One&Only Palmilla resort hotel. A long crescent of sand, Palmilla's dependably calm surf makes it one of the best swimming beaches along the Corridor. If you've brought your mask and fins, there's decent snorkeling along the rocks toward the point. Thatched palapa umbrellas provide welcome shade, and if you're in the mood to fish, the Fisherman's Cooperative in the beach parking lot will gladly arrange a trip. The wellsigned turn-off (look for the Palmilla resort signs) is near the Km 27 marker. The paved access road winds through Palmilla's golf course before reaching the beach.

Most of the beaches facing the Gulf of California are safe for swimming; those facing the open Pacific should be appreciated only for the view. Pay attention to any warning signs: Some beaches are prone to riptides and dangerous breakers, or have deep drop-offs close to shore. All beaches in Mexico are the property of the government and consequently are accessible to the public. Parking at or camping on deserted beaches is perfectly legal; it is not legal, however, to leave behind garbage of any kind. Driving on beaches in Mexico also is illegal.

#### **Outdoor Recreation**

Two activities define the outdoor life at Los Cabos: sport fishing and golf. The waters of the Gulf of California and the Pacific Ocean are home to some 850 species of fish. The gulf in particular has a rich and varied marine population, including whale sharks, manta rays, schooling hammerhead sharks, stingrays, moray eels and sea turtles.

Of the two dozen or so game species widely caught in Baja waters, striped marlin run year-round. The season for the majestic blue marlin is June through mid-November. Others commonly hooked include amberjack, black marlin, bonito, black sea bass, corbina, dorado (mahi mahi), roosterfish, sailfish, snapper, wahoo, yellowfin tuna and vellowtail.

During the season it is advisable to book fishing trips well in advance of your trip; some participants reserve boats as much as a year in advance for the Bisbee's Los Cabos Offshore and the Bisbee's Black and Blue, both held the second half of October. These are among the world's richest marlin fishing tournaments, with base entry fees of several thousand dollars.

A catch-and-release policy is strongly emphasized; anglers experience the thrill of battle, but after their catch is reeled in it is tagged and set free, helping to preserve billfish species and ensure the continuation of the sport.

Most of the larger resort hotels have their own sportfishing fleets, making it easy to plan an excursion if you're a guest looking for fun things to do on vacation. The Fiesta Americana Grand Los Cabos, the Solmar resort properties and the One&Only Palmilla have fleets with boats anchored at the Cabo San Lucas Marina.

If you prefer to make your own arrangements, several fleet operators operate from the marina's docks on the south side of the harbor. ABY Charters is at the marina's main dock, next to the Flea Market (Mercado de Artesanías); phone (624) 143-0831 or (866) 751-3505 (from the United States).

Pangas (small, outboard motor-powered skiffs) holding two or three people can be rented by the hour, including equipment and a fishing license (required).

More expensive sport-fishing cruisers normally rent for group travel and parties of four to six people so expenses can be shared; the cost usually includes tackle, bait, licenses, lunch and a captain and mate, but not taxes or tips. Rates range from \$700 to more than \$1,000 per day, depending on the size of the boat. Trips depart around 7 a.m. and return by 2 or 3 in the afternoon. Most boats either head east to the fertile fishing grounds of the Gordo Banks or around Los Arcos toward the open Pacific.

Several water sports centers provide a full range of rental equipment as well as organized snorkeling and

scuba trips that are perfect if you're looking for things to do this weekend. Manta Scuba Diving specializes in scuba and snorkeling excursions to Chileno Bay. They also conduct two-tank boat dives with an Englishspeaking guide to nearby sites, twice daily. Bringing your own dive gear is recommended, although rental equipment is available. All major credit cards accepted. The dive shop is located near the south end of the marina at Plaza Gali #37; phone (624) 144-3871.

SeeCreatures, on Boulevard Marina in Plaza Gali (across from the sport-fishing docks), offers guided natural history, scuba and snorkeling tours. These excursions venture to such prime spots as the Socorro Islands, about 200 miles southwest of Cabo San Lucas, inhabited by 400-pound tuna and exotic species of reef fish; Land's End, a destination home to octopus, tropicals and sea lions; and Cabo Pulmo National Marine Park, site of a living coral reef that offers experienced divers some of the clearest water and richest marine life in the world.

Most trips are aboard a 25-foot canopied skiff that accommodates four people, or a newer 30-foot boat that can carry up to ten divers. For additional information and reservations phone (624) 143-6915 (from the United States).

Gray whales complete their long-distance migration from the Bering Sea to the warm Pacific waters of the mid- and lower Baja coastline each year from January through March. They can sometimes be spotted from the beaches and rocky overlooks along the Mex. 1 Corridor and the rocks around Land's End.

As popular as sport fishing—if not more so—is golf. A few decades ago the nine-hole Mayan Palace Golf Course in San José del Cabo was it. Now world-class Cabo San Lucas golf courses are scattered along the Corridor between the two Cabos. Some—like the Tiger Woodsdesigned El Cardonal course in the Diamante condo community-are open to members only. Golfing is one of the more expensive things to do in Los Cabos; greens fees for 18 holes average more than \$225 (somewhat less in the low season), cart and bottled water included.

The signature hole at the Nicklaus-designed Palmilla Golf Club, at the One&Only Palmilla resort, is the par-4 fifth. The tee shot must carry over a cactus-filled canyon, which also wraps around in front of the green. The desert vegetation, Gulf of California vistas and view from the mountaintop clubhouse are all breathtaking, and the play is a strategic challenge. For information phone the resort at (624) 144-5250.

The Golden Bear also designed the highly regarded Ocean Course at the Cabo del Sol resort development. The final three holes offer dramatic waterfront scenery as well as an assortment of hazards in the form of cactus, rock cliffs and treacherous bunkers. Instead of negotiating

long fairways, players tee off over deep ravines to landing pads and then chip to the green. Even the short par 3 holes are formidable.

The Tom Weiskopf-designed Desert Course features an inland layout that nevertheless provides a view of the gulf from every hole. For information about either course phone the resort at (877) 703-4394 (toll-free from the United States), or the Golf Shop at (866) 231-4677 (tollfree from the United States).

The Cabo Real Golf Course, at Corridor Km marker 19.5, was designed by Robert Trent Jones. It winds its way among beautiful homes and the exclusive Las Ventanas al Paraiso resort. Average players can handle the layout, which doesn't mean play is easy. The palmflanked 14th-hole fairway sweeps down to the beach, while the 15th tee, right at the surf, offers the most spectacular view of the course. Reservations can be made by phoning (624) 173-9400, 01 (800) 543-2044 (toll-free long distance within Mexico) or (877) 795-8727 (toll-free from the United States).

The Nicklaus-designed course at the members-only Eldorado Golf Club, at Km marker 21 on the Corridor (next to the Westin Resort & Spa at the northeast end of the Cabo Real development), has six holes right along the beach. The layout winds from seaside to rocky canyons and back, with the green at the par-3 16th hole framed by the gulf's cobalt-blue waters. For reservations, phone (624) 144-5464 or (866) 513-4434 (from the United States).

The Cabo San Lucas Country Club is just a short distance east of Cabo San Lucas. This is the only course in Los Cabos with a view of the Land's End rocks, which look particularly impressive from the 18th hole. The gently sloping fairways look out on a desert landscape that features giant cardon cacti. The seventh hole, a par 5 double dogleg that wraps around a lake, is a whopping 620 yards. Greens fees range from \$65 (2 p.m. to closing, June through October) to \$155 (U.S.), a tad lower than at the other championship courses. For additional information phone (624) 143-4654. Note: The course does not accept U.S. dollars; payment is by credit card or pesos only.

# Dining

Restaurants located inside hotels are expensive and, on the whole, predictably good. If you're wondering where to eat more local fare, hit the streets. Cabo is famed for fish tacos, but you'll also find shrimp, pork, chicken and beef varieties. For the most part, the food at the bars and restaurants lining Medano Beach and the marina malecón is very good, but also overpriced. For better *comida* at more digestible prices, try the open-air Cabo San Lucas restaurants in the downtown area, many run by families. These are good places for late night tacos or a hearty breakfast

of *huevos rancheros*, eggs and black beans drenched in tomato salsa, sprinkled with cheese and served with tortillas.

Torta (sandwich) stands also pop up on downtown street corners after dark and are good places to eat. Ham and cheese is a common and tasty variety. Many stands grill hot dogs and whip up tacos as well. Use the same common sense at these places that applies whenever sampling street food in Mexico-if there's a crowd hovering around a cart and the food looks hot and fresh, it should be fine. Squeezing lots of lime juice over the meat helps kill any lingering bacteria.

## Shopping

A one-stop destination for shopping, entertainment and things to do in downtown Cabo is the Puerto Paraiso mall, off Avenida Lázaro Cárdenas between Plaza Bonita Mall and the Marina Fiesta resort. On a par with American malls, Paraiso is a modern, three-level collection of clothing chains, boutique-type shops, gift stores, high-end jewelry merchants and local restaurants. The center is designed for open-air strolling along attractively landscaped terraces, as well as window shopping in air-conditioned comfort.

On the lower level, American restaurant chains like Ruth's Chris Steakhouse front the marina. For kids there is a video arcade, a 10-screen movie theater complex and a fast-food court. Puerto Paraiso is open daily 9-9, with extended hours at major restaurants.

No shopping tour of Cabo is complete without wandering the streets in the vicinity of Plaza Amelia Wilkes, a traditional Mexican square with a gazebo at its center that's one of the fun places to go. Pepita's Magic of the Moon, in the vicinity of the plaza on Avenida Francisco I. Madero (between Vicente Guerrero and Marina Boulevard) sells designer women's fashions-casual, colorful outfits with tropical motifs that fit right in at a beachside resort.

Galerías Zen Mar, near the corner of Avenida Lázaro Cárdenas and Calle Acuario, is a combination art gallery and museum with an outstanding variety of ethnic masks from all over Mexico, including Day of the Dead designs. Ex-votos have facial writings describing why the mask was made for a particular religious ceremony; retablos (small devotional paintings) depict emotions without the use of words. Most of the works are for sale.

# **Nightlife**

Bars and live music—that pretty much sums up the nightlife scene in Cabo San Lucas. The Cabo Wabo Cantina, on Calle Vicente Guerrero just south of Avenida Lázaro Cárdenas, is owned by rocker Sammy Hagar. Young crowds pack the place for regular live shows by a rock cover band and occasional visits from big-name acts, including Hagar himself; hard rock and dance pop blasts from the sound system on other nights. It's open daily until 2 a.m.

The Giggling Marlin, on Boulevard Marina at Calle Matamoros, blasts classic rock and dance hits, has frequent live music and puts on a saucy audienceparticipation show. The attraction here is a pulley device that dangles patrons upside down—rather like a captured fish—for a great photo op. There's also a restaurant on the premises that serves good Mexican and seafood dishes. To find it, look for the beer bottle-toting marlin atop

Also high on the see-and-be-seen circuit is El Squid Roe. on Avenida Lázaro Cárdenas at Boulevard Marina (across from Plaza Bonita Mall). This three-level nightclub is loud, raucous and invariably packed. Be forewarned: It's the kind of place where waiters brandishing spray tanks of tequila move through crowds of people dancing on top of tables. An open-air dance floor is on the main level.

For a mellower evening, the Whale Watchers Bar in the Sandos Finisterra hotel, off Boulevard Marina heading out toward Land's End, is an ideal place to watch the sun slowly drop into the Pacific and enjoy a romantic evening.

LAND'S END (Finisterra) is at the confluence of the Pacific Ocean and the Gulf of California (Sea of Cortez). This southernmost tip of the Baja California peninsula generally refers not just to one specific outcropping, but rather the slender chain of rocks protruding from the waters south of Cabo San Lucas. The most well-known of this group is El Arco (The Arch).

Although visible from shore, the best way to see the eroded formations that constitute Land's End is from the water. Fleets of water taxis (many of the "glass-bottom" variety) line up at the marina to take passengers on a roughly 45-minute trip for up-close looks at these unusual rocky outcroppings. Among the formations along the way are Pelican City, a group of rocks where members of that large-billed species congregate; another clump of rocks where a colony of seals likes to hang out; a cave said to have been a favorite of pirates; Lover's and Divorce beaches; and, of course, El Arco.

Since these water taxi excursions are extremely popular, in order to provide good views the guide may have to maneuver his craft past numerous other water taxis; boats carrying snorkelers and scuba divers to nearby offshore locations; fishing boats; and other watercraft towing parasailers. Before returning to shore, the

boat swings by a small rock jutting up from the water, the actual "land's end."

El Arco (The Arch) is part of the Land's End formation stretching offshore near the point where the Gulf of California and the Pacific Ocean meet. The iconic image of Cabo San Lucas, El Arco is a natural granite arch that has been carved by wind and water.

While the arch is readily visible from shore, its size and beauty are best appreciated close up. Water taxis, available at the marina, take passengers past the arch and will drop guests off on request at nearby Lover's Beach (Playa del Amor), which faces the swimmable Gulf of California. The opposite side of the beach fronting the rough waters of the Pacific is not safe for swimming. Note: If you opt to linger at Lover's Beach, remember to set a time for the water taxi to pick you up for the trip back to Cabo San Lucas.

WHALE PHOTO SAFARI departs from the Cabo Dolphins Center building at the marina on Paseo de la Marina (the *malecón*). Cabo Adventures takes you off the southern tip of the Baja Peninsula to view gray and northern humpback whales; both species migrate to the warm waters of the Sea of Cortez to breed and to nurse their young. An inflatable all-weather speed boat moves quickly and easily among the gentle giants. While sightings are not guaranteed, the best chance is in January and February.

Other marine animals you'll likely encounter are wild dolphins (they seem to love small boats), sea turtles and manta rays that fling themselves out of the water for an occasional somersault. Experienced guides provide background information about the whales, their habits and their habitat.

The all-day Sea of Cortés Adventure begins with a catamaran cruise to Espiritu Santo Island for a guided snorkeling excursion, followed by a stop at secluded Isla Partida beach for lunch and relaxing. Round-trip transportation from selected hotels is included.

Bring a camera, hat, sweater or light jacket, sunscreen and a towel for the whale-watching trip. Snacks and bottled water are provided. Bring swimwear, sunscreen, a hat, nonslip shoes and a change of clothes for the Sea of Cortés Adventure; previous snorkeling experience is recommended.

**Time:** Allow 3 hours minimum. **Phone:** (322) 226-8413, or (888) 526-2238 (from the United States and Canada).

# BAHIA HOTEL & BEACH HOUSE BOOK NOW 844/321-9636



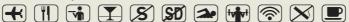
Hotel. Address: Avenida del Pescador Medano S/N 23453. Facility: 89 units, some two bedrooms. 6 stories, exterior corridors. Bath: shower only. Parking: on-site and valet. Amenities: safes. Dining: 2 restaurants, also, Bar Esquina, see separate listing, entertainment. Pool: heated outdoor. Activities: hot tub, exercise room. Guest Services: valet laundry.

























# BREATHLESS CABO SAN LUCAS BOOK NOW 624/104-9500





AAA Benefit: Members save up to 10% and earn World of Hyatt points when booking AAA/CAA rates!

Hotel. Address: Paseo de la Marina 4750 23410. Location:

Waterfront. Facility: This adults-only resort is located right on the marina. Expect a lively pool atmosphere and nightly entertainment. Guest rooms are spacious with large balconies and marble baths. Meets AAA guest room security requirements. 169 units. 6 stories, exterior corridors. Parking: valet only. Terms: age restrictions may apply. Amenities: safes. Dining: 7 restaurants, nightclub, entertainment. Pool: heated outdoor. Activities: sauna, hot tub, steamroom, beach on-site, health club, spa. Guest Services: valet laundry.



# THE CAPE, A THOMPSON HOTEL BOOK NOW 624/163-0000







AAA Benefit: Members save up to 10% and earn World of Hvatt points when booking AAA/CAA rates!

Boutique Contemporary Hotel. Address: Carretera Transpeninsular KM 5 23455. Location: Oceanfront. Facility: Modern design meets

beachfront style at this resort. The oversize guest rooms have tile flooring, open bathroom areas, whimsical design and balconies with amazing views of the iconic landmark El Arco. Meets AAA guest room security requirements. 161 units, some two bedrooms, three bedrooms, efficiencies and kitchens. 5-6 stories, exterior corridors. Parking: valet only. Amenities: safes. Dining: 4 restaurants, also, Manta, see separate listing, entertainment. Pool: heated outdoor. Activities: sauna, hot tub, steamroom, beach on-site, cabanas, recreation programs, bicycles, health club, spa. Guest Services: valet laundry.





























# CASA DORADA RESORT & SPA LOS CABOS BOOK NOW 624/163-5700





Resort Hotel. Address: Ave El Pescador S/N Col El Medano 23450. Location: Oceanfront. Facility: Located on popular Medano Beach, this resort offers upscale rooms and fine dining with sweeping views of the famous rock arches. The lobby lounge is very popular. Meets AAA guest room security requirements. 183 kitchen units, some two bedrooms. 7 stories, exterior corridors. Parking: valet only. Amenities: safes. Dining: 5 restaurants. Pool: heated outdoor. Activities: sauna, hot tub, steamroom, beach on-site, self-propelled boats, playground, lawn sports, exercise room, spa. Guest Services: valet laundry.

























CHILENO BAY RESORT & RESIDENCES, AUBERGE RESORTS

COLLECTION

**BOOK NOW** 

624/104-9600

FOUR DIAMOND INSPECTED @ CLEAN Resort Hotel. **Address:** Carretera Libre Transpeninsular KM 15 23410.

# CORAZÓN CABO RESORT & SPA BOOK NOW 624/143-9166



Resort Condominium. Address: Pelicanos 225, El Medano Ejidal 23453. Location: Oceanfront. Facility: This location doesn't get any better. All rooms have balconies and most overlook the famous Land's End rock formations. There are three pools, two are infinity edge and overlook the ocean. Meets AAA quest room security requirements. 305 units, some condominiums. 6-9 stories, exterior corridors. **Parking:** valet only. **Terms:** check-in 4 pm. Amenities: safes. Dining: 5 restaurants, nightclub, entertainment. Pool: heated outdoor. Activities: sauna, hot tub, steamroom, beach on-site, self-propelled boats, fishing, snorkeling, exercise room, spa. Guest Services: valet laundry.































ESPERANZA AN AUBERGE RESORT BOOK NOW

624/145-6400



Boutique Resort Hotel. Address: Carr Transpeninsular KM 7, Punta Ballena 23410.



FAIRFIELD BY MARRIOTT LOS CABOS BOOK NOW 624/144-2700



AAA Benefit: Members save 5% or more and earn Marriott Bonvoy™ points when booking AAA/CAA rates!

SWE Hotel. Address: Ave Lazaro Cardenas 2709, Col Medano 23410.



GRAND FIESTA AMERICANA LOS CABOS ALL INCLUSIVE GOLF &

**BOOK NOW** 

624/145-6200



Resort Hotel. Address: Carr Transpeninsular KM 103, Lote A-1 23410.

**BOOK NOW** GRAND SOLMAR LAND'S END RESORT & SPA

Hotel. Address: Ave Solmar No 1A 23450.

INSPECTED @ CLEAN

OUR DIAMOND

HACIENDA BEACH CLUB & RESIDENCES

BOOK NOW 624/163-3140

FOUR DIAMOND INSPECTED @ CLEAN Vacation Rental Condominium. Address: 4732 Paseo de la marina 23453.

HACIENDA ENCANTADA RESORT & SPA LOS CABOS

**BOOK NOW** 

624/163-5555

FOUR DIAMOND INSPECTED @ CLEAN Resort Hotel. Address: Carr Transpeninsular 73 KM 23455.

HARD ROCK HOTEL LOS CABOS BOOK NOW

624/689-0300



Resort Hotel. Address: Fraccionamiento Diamante 23410. Location: Oceanfront. Facility: This all-inclusive resort offers many restaurants, pools and a fun party vibe. Guests may also enjoy the bowling alley and basketball court. All of the rooms feature a jetted tub on the balcony. 639 units, some two and three bedrooms. 1-7 stories, interior/ exterior corridors. Parking: on-site and valet. Amenities: safes. Dining: 7 restaurants, nightclub, entertainment. Pool: heated outdoor. Activities: sauna, hot tub, steamroom, beach on-site, tennis, recreation programs, kids club, health club, spa. Guest Services: valet laundry.

























HOTEL RIU PALACE CABO SAN LUCAS

**BOOK NOW** 

624/146-7160



Resort Hotel. Address: Camino Viejo a San Jose 23453.



INSPECTED @ CLEAN

HOTEL RIU SANTA FE BOOK NOW 624/163-6150

Resort Hotel. Address: Camino Viejo A San Jose Del Cabo 23453.



MARINA FIESTA RESORT & SPA BOOK NOW 624/145-6020



Condominium. Address: Paseo de La Marina Lote 37 y 38 23410.



ME CABO BY MELIÁ BOOK NOW 624/145-7800



Boutique Hotel. Address: Playa El Medano S/N Zona Hotelera 23410.



MONTAGE LOS CABOS

**BOOK NOW** 

624/163-2000



Resort Hotel. Address: Carretera Transpeninsular KM 125 23450.



NOBU HOTEL LOS CABOS BOOK NOW 624/689-0160



Contemporary Resort Hotel. Address: Poligono 1 Fraccion D Fracc Diamante 23410. Location: Oceanfront. Facility: This secluded property is located in the exclusive Diamanté golf resort. The luxurious design of the resort combines Japanese and Mexican influences. Some guest rooms have a private or swim-up pool. Meets AAA guest room security requirements. 200 units, some two bedrooms and kitchens. 2-5 stories, interior corridors. Parking: valet only. Amenities: safes. Dining: 5 restaurants, entertainment. Pool: heated outdoor. Activities: hot tub, beach on-site, cabanas, recreation programs, kids club, health club, spa. Guest Services: valet laundry.





















624/145-7575









PLAYA GRANDE RESORT & GRAND SPA BOOK NOW

Resort Condominium. Address: Ave Playa Grande No 1 23450.





PUEBLO BONITO LOS CABOS BOOK NOW 624/142-9797





Resort Condominium. Address: Playa El Medano S/N 23410.



# PUEBLO BONITO PACIFICA GOLF & SPA RESORT BOOK NOW 624/142-9696



Resort Hotel. Address: Predio Paraiso Escondido S/N 23450. Location: Oceanfront. Facility: Located outside Cabo San Lucas on beautiful Sunset Beach, this all-inclusive, adults-only resort boasts elegant guest rooms, spacious baths and upscale bedding. Meets AAA guest room security requirements. 201 units. 3-5 stories, exterior corridors. Parking: on-site and valet. Terms: age restrictions may apply. Amenities: safes. Dining: 3 restaurants. Pool: heated outdoor. Activities: sauna, hot tub, steamroom, beach on-site, cabanas, tennis, recreation programs, health club, spa. Guest Services: valet laundry, area transportation.



























PUEBLO BONITO ROSÉ RESORT & SPA BOOK NOW 624/142-9898



Resort Condominium. Address: Playa El Medano S/N 23410.



# PUEBLO BONITO SUNSET BEACH RESORT & SPA BOOK NOW

624/142-9999



Resort Hotel. Address: Predio paraiso Escondido S/N Col Centro 23450. Location: Oceanfront. Facility: The resort's hacienda-style buildings are terraced on the hillside, providing all rooms with a sunset view over the Pacific. Guests can enjoy all Pueblo Bonito resorts facilities by using the shuttle. Meets AAA guest room security requirements. 757 efficiency kitchen units, some two and three bedrooms. 2-6 stories (no elevator), exterior corridors. Parking: on-site and valet. Amenities: safes. Dining: 19 restaurants, also, LaFrida Restaurant, see separate listing, entertainment. Pool: heated outdoor. Activities: sauna, hot tub, steamroom, beach on-site, tennis, recreation programs, kids club, health club, spa. Guest Services: valet laundry, area transportation.

































THE RESIDENCES AT HACIENDA ENCANTADA RESORT

**BOOK NOW** 

624/163-5555

FOUR DIAMOND INSPECTED @ CLEAN Vacation Rental House.



RIU PALACE BAJA CALIFORNIA

BOOK NOW 624/163-1000



Contemporary Resort Hotel. Address: Camino Viejo a San Jose Del Cabo 23453.



SANDOS FINISTERRA

**BOOK NOW** 624/145-6700



Resort Hotel. Address: Domicilio Conocido 23410.



624/163-4600



Resort Condominium. Address: KM 45 Corredor Turistico 23455. Location: Oceanfront. Facility: This lovely property sits just outside of town along a beautiful stretch of coastline. Guest rooms are spacious with separate living areas and feature many comforts of home. 108 condominiums. 4-5 stories, exterior corridors. Parking: on-site and valet. Terms: check-in 4 pm. Amenities: safes. Dining: 2 restaurants, entertainment. Pool: heated outdoor. Activities: hot tub, beach on-site, self-propelled boats, snorkeling, recreation programs, game room, picnic facilities, health club, massage. Guest Services: complimentary and valet laundry.



























SOLMAR RESORT

**BOOK NOW** 



Resort Hotel. Address: Ave Solmar No 1 23410.

VILLA DEL ARCO BEACH RESORT & GRAND SPA BOOK NOW

THREE DIAMOND INSPECTED @ CLEAN Resort Condominium. Address: KM 05 Camino Viejo a San Jose 23410.

VILLA DEL PALMAR BEACH RESORT & SPA

**BOOK NOW** 

THREE DIAMOND INSPECTED @ CLEAN

> FOUR DIAMOND INSPECTED @ CLEAN

Resort Condominium. Address: KM 05 Camino Viejo a San Jose 23450.

VISTA ENCANTADA SPA RESORT & RESIDENCES

**BOOK NOW** 

877/319-5555

Boutique Resort Hotel. Address: Carr Transpeninsular 73 KM 23455.

Please refer to pages 10-11 for Inspected Clean details.

# WALDORF ASTORIA LOS CABOS PEDREGAL BOOK NOW 624/163-4300





# AAA Benefit: Members save up to 10% and earn Honors points when booking AAA/CAA rates!

Resort Hotel. Address: Calle Camino del Mar No 1 23455. Location: Oceanfront. Facility: The dramatic entry through a guarter-mile-long mountain tunnel leads guests to this unique and secluded luxury resort. The cliff-side beachfront location provides privacy for a relaxing getaway. Meets AAA guest

room security requirements. 112 units, some two bedrooms, three bedrooms, kitchens, houses and condominiums. 1-4 stories, exterior corridors. Parking: valet only. Amenities: safes. Dining: 3 restaurants, also, El Farallon, see separate listing, entertainment. Pool: heated outdoor. Activities: sauna, hot tub, steamroom, beach on-site, tennis, recreation programs, kids club, health club, spa. Guest Services: valet laundry.

































#### WHERE TO EAT



**FIVE DIAMOND** 

INSPECTED @ CLEAN

BAR ESQUINA 624/143-1890



International Casual Dining. Address: Ave del Pescador S/N Col El Medano 23410.



COMAL 624/104-9600



New Latin American Fine Dining. Address: Carretera Transpeninsular KM 15 23410.



EL FARALLON 624/163-4300



Seafood Fine Dining. Address: Calle Camino del Mar No 1 23455.



#### AFRIDA RESTAURANT 624/142-9999



Mexican Fine Dining. Expert Advice: This elegant restaurant offers a romantic setting in the candlelit dining room with its fine Mexican artwork and live pianist. The menu features a mix of sophisticated Mexican cuisine. Meals are best finished with after-dinner coffees and liqueurs, some of which are prepared tableside by the highly professional and formal waitstaff. Resort quests on all-inclusive plans may incur additional charges. Age restrictions may apply. Features: full bar, patio dining. Reservations: required. Address: Precious paraiso Escondido S/N Col Centro 23450. Parking: valet only.





International Fusion Fine Dining. Address: Carretera Transpeninsular KM 5 23455.





Mexican Fine Dining. Address: Carretera Transpeninsular KM 125 23450.

#### **ENSENADA, BAJA CALIFORNIA**

Ensenada (ehn-seh-NAH-dah) spreads over scrubcovered hills that slope down to the shores of Bahía de Todos Santos (Todos Santos Bay). The city (its name, not surprisingly, means "bay") is a scenic destination with pleasant weather, duty-free shopping, fine sport fishing and close proximity to the United States; Ensenada is the farthest many weekend visitors ever get into Mexico.

The first real roots were put down by ranchers, who began settling the area in the early 19th century. Ensenada temporarily boomed in 1870 with the discovery of gold at nearby Real del Castillo. The town became a supply depot for miners and was designated the capital of the Baja California Territory in 1882. By the early 20th century, however, the mines had given out, the capital was relocated to Mexicali and Ensenada lapsed back into obscurity.

After U.S. Prohibition went into effect in the late 1920s, Ensenada—along with Tijuana—became a favored drinking and gambling destination for Hollywood stars and other well-heeled types. Real revitalization came with agricultural reform and development in the Mexicali Valley. A nearby port was needed to handle the export of farm produce to the United States and mainland Mexico, and Ensenada's harbor facilities made it an obvious choice for development.

The completion of paved highway Mex. 1 from Tijuana opened the city up to American vacationers and sportfishing enthusiasts. Ensenada is a little far for a day trip; a weekend getaway allows you to dine, stroll, shop, do some fishing, visit a winery or attend one of the city's many annual events.

#### **Practicalities**

Ensenada is about 109 kilometers (68 miles) south of Tijuana. The city's small airport, south of town off Mex. 1, accommodates only private planes. A tourist permit is not required for stays of less than 72 hours or if you do not travel any farther south than the town of Maneadero, south of Ensenada. For additional information about border crossing regulations see the Border Information section in the back of this guide.

Four-lane toll highway Mex. 1-D is a quick, convenient route south from Tijuana. From the border, follow the prominent "Ensenada Toll Road" (Ensenada Cuota) signs along westbound Calle Internacional, which parallels the border fence to the junction with Mex. 1-D. Make sure you choose the proper exit lane, or you could be routed back to downtown Tijuana. The first of three toll plazas between the two cities is at Playas de Tijuana. The second is on the southern edge of Rosarito Beach; the third is at the village of San Miguel, about 13 kilometers (8 miles) north of Ensenada. The toll at each plaza is around 35 pesos. The final stretch from San Miguel to Ensenada is via fourlane, non-toll Mex. 1.

Alternative free Mex. 1 (look for signs that say *Libre*) parallels Mex. 1-D most of the way, although it turns inland south of the village of La Misión, about 44 kilometers (27) miles) north of Ensenada. The travel time is longer, and the road has some rough spots. Avoid night driving along this and other two-lane secondary roads in northern Baja, as both cattle and pedestrians frequently cross them.

The main bus station is in the northern part of town on Avenida Riveroll, between calles 10 and 11. Bus service is inexpensive; local routes are designated by street name, usually painted on the windshield. The Autotransportes de Baja California bus line provides regular service to cities up and down the peninsula. For additional information about buses see Bus Service, page p. 36.

Taxis, many of them minivans, congregate near the hotels along Avenida López Mateos. Although their ubiquitous solicitations can be annoying, drivers are normally courteous and knowledgeable. Make sure, however, that the fare is decided before you set off. Taxis can be hired for trips to such outlying destinations as La Bufadora (see attraction listing) and the Guadalupe Valley wineries. Round-trip rates run \$40-\$50 (U.S.), depending on the number of passengers.

In the event of emergency, dial 911 (English may not be spoken). For tourist assistance that isn't of an emergency



nature or help with legal problems, dial 078; you should then be connected to the nearest State Tourism Office during normal office hours. A calling card is not needed to dial either of these three-digit numbers from a public phone. For medical emergencies, Clinica Hospital Cardiomed is located downtown at Av. Obregón #1018. Phone (646) 178-0351 (English spoken).

One of Ensenada's best features is its mild climate, similar to coastal Southern California and with fewer extremes of heat than almost any other Baja city. Winter evenings can be chilly, but the temperature seldom drops below 40 F. Summers are warm and dry, with occasional hot spells caused by Santa Ana winds blowing in from the desert. Almost all of the annual precipitation falls between December and March. Fierce Pacific storms sometimes bring torrential winter rains, and early summer can be quite foggy.

Personal safety is a matter of common sense. Tourists are invariably welcomed, as their dollars sustain many local businesses. If traveling by car, the best advice is to drive safely and defensively; traffic accidents are one of the biggest sources of vacation headaches in Mexico. One way to minimize risk is to stop at every intersection, even those that don't have stop signs.

# **City Layout**

The preferred route into downtown Ensenada (signed "Centro") branches off Mex. 1 about 2.5 miles north of the city and follows the coastline. It becomes Boulevard Lázaro Cárdenas (more commonly known as Boulevard Costero), one of two main thoroughfares traversing the waterfront tourist zone. Boulevard Costero runs along the harbor. A block inland is Avenida López Mateos, also called Paseo Calle Primera. Both of these streets are lined with hotels, local restaurants, bars, shops, night-spots and other businesses catering to visitors.

Heading south, Boulevard Costero ends at Calle Agustín Sangines (also called Calle Delante), which proceeds east to Mex. 1. Mex. 1, the Transpeninsular Highway, then continues south to Maneadero and on down the peninsula.

The *malecón* is a bayside walkway running for half a mile between Boulevard Azueta and Avenida Castillo. Here are the sport-fishing piers, a towering flagpole and huge Mexican flag, Plaza Cívica (see attraction listing) and the cruise ship terminal. It's one of the best places to go in town for a breezy stroll, and there are benches for relaxing.

Away from the waterfront, Ensenada is easy to negotiate. The terrain is flat, and the layout is a basic grid. Avenues (avenidas) are named and run north-south; streets (calles) are numbered and run east-west. Streets and avenues are often unmarked, however. To orient yourself, count off city blocks inland from Avenida López Mateos,

which is also known as Calle 1; successive streets are Calle 2, Calle 3, etc. The commercial business district centers around avenidas Ruíz and Juárez (the in-town extensions of Mex. 1) at the western end of downtown.

Driving tips to keep in mind: As in other Baja cities, traffic lights are small and often hard to spot from a distance. Stop (alto) signs placed at intersections can be obscure, so always proceed slowly and with caution. Some downtown streets are one way. The pay lot at the Plaza Marina shopping center, on Boulevard Costero just north of the sport-fishing piers, is convenient for nearby waterfront wandering.

The city's low skyline is distinguished by the twin spires of Our Lady of Guadalupe (Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe), at the corner of Calle 6 and Avenida Floresta. The cathedral, built in typical Spanish colonial style, is one of Ensenada's most prominent structures and can be used as a downtown orientation landmark. Named for the Virgin of Guadalupe, Mexico's patron saint, it is the focus for celebrations on Dec. 12 (see Special Events).

# **Shopping**

The main tourist shopping area is along Avenida López Mateos. Numerous vendors hawk their wares, and gift shops lining the blocks between avenidas Castillo and Ruíz feature such imported items as silver and gold jewelry, onyx chess sets, leather boots and fine liquor. Some of the shops have fixed prices; English is usually spoken and credit cards are welcomed. Los Castillo, on Avenida López Mateos between avenidas Rayon and Aldama, carries Taxco silver jewelry guaranteed to be at least 92.5 percent pure (designated by the numerals ".925").

This upscale merchandise is augmented by curio shops that stock traditional Mexican craft and clothing items like baskets, ceramics, guitars, jewelry, wrought-iron furniture and leather jackets, purses and sandals. On Boulevard Costero at Avenida Castillo is the Handicrafts Center (Centro Artesanía), a cluster of craft stalls. In particular, take time to wander through Galería Pérez Meillon; this gallery sells Nuevo Casas Grandes pottery, Kumeyaay baskets and other authentic, handmade items fashioned by northern Mexican artisans using age-old techniques.

Hussong's Official Logo Store, at the corner of Avenidas López Mateos and Ruiz, is the place to go for T-shirts, hats, tequila shot glasses and souvenirs from your vacation bearing the Hussong's Cantina logo.

Ensenada's outdoor flea markets offer a chance to find the odd treasure amid piles of utilitarian wares. Los Globos, bordered by Calle 9, Calle Coral, Avenida Morelos and Avenida Juárez (3 blocks east of Avenida Reforma and about a mile from the waterfront), is especially

busy on weekends. Although you won't find many souvenirs, this full-blown Mexican marketplace is a change of pace from the tourist district.

#### **Outdoor Recreation**

Todos Santos Bay and the Pacific yield such cool-water species as albacore, barracuda, bonito, rockfish and vellowtail. Summer is the best time for sport fishing, although such bottom dwellers as sea bass, ling cod, rock cod, halibut and whitefish can be caught all year.

Charter arrangements can be made at the piers off the *malecón.* Rates for private groups range from about \$200 (U.S.) to upward of \$550 per day, depending on the size of the craft (an outboard-powered panga or a larger cruiser) and the number of passengers. Party boats for bigger groups cost about \$50 per person for an 8-hour day of fishing, plus an extra \$10 or so for a required Mexican fishing license. Bait and tackle are usually included, as is pick-up and drop-off from your hotel.

For fun things to do with friends in addition to fishing trips, Gordo's Sport Fishing Fleet offers privately chartered sightseeing boat tours of the bay; phone (646) 178-3515. Sergio's Sportfishing runs daily trips all year to Punta Banda, San Miguel Reef and the Todos Santos Islands, plus longer trips to the Outer Banks (about 35 miles offshore), usually from late May through September; phone (646) 178-2185, or (619) 399-7224 (from the United States).

If you'd like to scuba dive during your trip, Northern Baja diving conditions are similar to those off the coast of Southern California. Within easy reach of Ensenada are thick kelp forests sheltering a wide range of marine life. The tip of the Punta Banda Peninsula is a favored dive site; underwater mountains (sea mounts) are blanketed with colonies of anemones and sponges, and a variety of fish swim through growths of brilliant blue algae. Water temperatures are bracing—around 55 to 64 degrees F. The La Bufadora Dive Shop, near the end of the road to La Bufadora (see attraction listing), offers half-day diving and fishing trips. Equipment, wet suit and kayak rentals also are available; phone (646) 154-2092, or (619) 730-2903 (from the United States).

Punta Banda also has an abundance of hot springs; at spots along the beaches here, it is possible to dig into the sand and create your own hole from which soothing hot waters bubble. There are a couple of RV parks and camping areas along BC 23, the paved road that traverses the peninsula. Several unmarked hiking trails also lead off this road.

Ensenada is on the last leg of a gray whale migration journey that begins in the Bering Sea and ends at coastal bays and lagoons along the southern half of the Baja Peninsula. From late December through March the whales pass between the shoreline and the Todos Santos Islands, a little more than a mile offshore. Some of them come close enough to scratch their backs along the bay floor, removing barnacles and parasites. The rugged coastline north and south of town, and especially the end of the Punta Banda Peninsula, provides some excellent lookout points. Gordo's Sport Fishing Fleet, Sergio's Sportfishing and La Bufadora Dive all offer whale-watching trips in tour boats during the peak viewing months.

There are no beaches within the city proper. Most visitors head for Estero Beach, about 12 kilometers (7 miles) south of downtown Ensenada via Mex. 1; the turn-off, about 7.5 kilometers (4.5 miles) south, is well marked. Along the shore of Estero Inlet there are gentle waves and a long stretch of sand.

Southern California surfers gravitate to several spots in the vicinity of Ensenada, including Punta San Miguel, a point next to the village of the same name; Punta Salsipuedes, north of Punta San Miguel; and Estero Beach. But the ultimate surf location in northern Baja is off the Todos Santos Islands (Islas Todos Santos), located at the mouth of Todos Santos Bay. These twin islands catch the full brunt of winter swells from the north Pacific, and waves can reach 30 feet. The San Miguel Surf Shop, on Avenida López Mateos between avenidas Miramar and Gastélum, is the local surfer hangout.

# Dining and Nightlife

If you're looking for great places to eat, head to Ensenada's traditional open-air Seafood Market, at the north end of Boulevard Costero at Avenida Miramar, is just north of the sport-fishing piers. Known to locals as the Mercado de Mariscos, the covered sheds displaying freshly caught fish and shellfish have a suitably salty ambience. Handcart vendors hawk fresh clams, oysters shucked on the spot and seafood cocktails.





Or visit online at: AAA.com/IDP or CAA.ca/services/travel







Fish tacos are an Ensenada staple. Stands opposite the Seafood Market offer strips of savory fried fish wrapped in a folded tortilla along with sour cream, guacamole, salsa (both *verde* and *roja*, green and red), cabbage, onions and cilantro. Avoid the mayonnaise that is left out on the tables, though. You also can get fish tacos, soups *(caldos)* and other reasonably priced seafood at the nearby outdoor food court Plaza del Marisco.

Stumbling into a small, out-of-the-way seafood restaurant hidden on a side street is one of the joys of exploring the city. Check the customers; if a place is full of locals, it's likely to be good. Mariscos Bahía Ensenada, at the corner of avenidas López Mateos and Riveroll, is a local restaurant with an extensive menu and a lively atmosphere complete with roving string trios. See the Lodgings & Restaurants section for AAA Diamond designated dining establishments.

Bars and clubs catering to tourists are downtown in the vicinity of Avenida López Mateos and Boulevard Costero. Hussong's Cantina, on Avenida Ruíz just east of Mateos, treats the designated driver in a group to free soft drinks while his or her companions indulge in margaritas and *cervezas*. Sawdust covers the hardwood floor and mariachi bands provide the music at a watering hole that has atmosphere to spare. Across from Hussong's is Papas & Beer, three floors of fun with free-flowing margaritas, blasting rock and high energy dance music, occasional live bands and numerous theme events.

An alternative to all this raucousness can be found at Bar Andaluz, in the Riviera del Pacífico (see attraction listing). This low-key lounge is a relaxed place to have an early evening drink. It's open noon-8 Sun.-Thurs., noon-9 Fri.-Sat.

Mexican dance, ballet and theatrical productions take place at the City Theater (Teatro de la Ciudad), on Calle Diamante between avenidas Pedro Loyola and Reforma. For event information phone (646) 177-0392.

# **Big Events**

Carnaval (Mardi Gras) is usually celebrated in mid-February on the 6 days prior to Ash Wednesday. A downtown street fair takes place each night, with midway rides, live entertainment, food vendors, parades of flower-covered floats and other merriment. The festivities climax with a masquerade ball; prizes are awarded for the best costume.

The Newport to Ensenada Race from Newport Beach, Calif., to Ensenada is held the last weekend in April. Hundreds of yachts depart from Newport Beach at noon, ending up in Ensenada about 11 hours later. Most remain in the city for a day or two, and a huge party with food,

music and dancing follows. For information contact the Newport Ocean Sailing Association; phone (949) 644-1023 (from the United States).

Thousands of cyclists make the 50-mile trek from Rosarito to Ensenada along Mex. 1 (the free road) during the Rosarito-Ensenada Bike Ride, which is held twice a year, in May and late September. Following the event, participants and supporters party at the Finish Line Fiesta, held at the Corona Hotel near the cruise ship terminal.

Franciscan and Dominican missionaries first introduced wine culture to Baja California in the 16th century as a way to celebrate holy Mass, and today a thriving wine industry is centered in the Guadalupe Valley. With an ideal climate for grape production and rich volcanic soil, vineyards in northeastern Baja California state produce some 90 percent of Mexican wines.

For 2 weeks in August the Grape Harvest Festival (Fiestas de la Vendimia) celebrates this bounty. Area wineries, many with vineyards in the nearby Guadalupe and El Escondido valleys, also offer tours (see Wineries). Many events require tickets; for more information phone the Association of Wine Growers of Baja California at (646) 178-3038. Restaurants from all over Mexico enter dishes for judging at the Baja Seafood Expo, which normally takes place in late September.

The deceased are honored during Day of the Dead celebrations Nov. 1-2. Beginning in mid-November is the SCORE Baja 1000 (commonly known as the Baja Mil), one of the world's most prestigious off-road races. There are separate categories for cars, trucks, motorcycles and ATVs. The course alternates between an 800-mile loop beginning and ending in Ensenada and a longer run from Ensenada to La Paz that takes place every third year. For information contact SCORE International; phone (775) 852-8907 (from the United States).

Another major festival is the Feast Day of Our Lady of Guadalupe (Día de Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe), celebrated Dec. 12. It honors the nation's patron saint, the Guadalupe Virgin. Carnival rides are set up in front of Our Lady of Guadalupe Church, and another attraction is the array of culinary specialties from all over Mexico.

**Tourism and Convention Bureau:** Boulevard Lázaro Cárdenas (Boulevard Costero) at Calle Macheros, at the western end of the city. This information booth (Modulo de Información Turismo) can provide maps, directions and information about special events. Open Mon.-Fri. 9-7, Sat. 10-4, Sun. 10-3 (hours may vary by season); English is spoken. **Phone:** (646) 178-8578, or (800) 310-9687 (from the United States).



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## WHERE TO EAT



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# LA PAZ. BAJA CALIFORNIA SUR

La Paz (lah PAHS) is the commercial and governmental capital of the state of Baja California Sur. Its name means "peace," and the Dove of Peace Monument, a large contemporary sculpture of a dove in flight just off Mex. 1 at the northern entrance to town, serves as a gateway to the city. A plague greets visitors with the following inscription: "And if you want peace, I offer it to you in the sunny peace of my bay."

Rich oyster beds below the surface of the Gulf of California attracted a handful of fortune seekers throughout the 17th century. The Jesuits founded a mission at La Paz in 1720 and kept it going despite a series of Indian uprisings. It was abandoned nearly 30 years later after disease had virtually wiped out the area's indigenous population; the city's cathedral stands on the site today.

Southern Baja's remoteness hindered any large-scale development. But as was the case with Ensenada and Cabo San Lucas, sportsmen and tourists slowly discovered the area's balmy winter climate and fine fishing. After years of existence as a neglected territory, the state of Baja California Sur experienced economic and population growth in the last half of the 20th century, and La Paz evolved from a sleepy port into a modern state capital.

Despite its commercial bustle, this is a laid-back city. Shady plazas and the palm-fringed malecón, the waterfront promenade along the bay, still retain some of the colonial grace of old. The old-fashioned charm is most evident on Sunday evenings, when couples and families go for a stroll against the backdrop of an oftenspectacular sunset.

Please refer to pages 10-11 for Inspected Clean details.

#### **Practicalities**

Marquéz de León International Airport is about 13 kilometers (8 miles) southwest of downtown off Mex. 1 (north toward the town of Ciudad Constitución). Aeroméxico and Delta provide service to La Paz; there are no direct flights from the United States. Volaris offers service from Mexican cities, including Guadalajara, Mexico City and Tijuana. For additional information about airlines see Arriving by Air, page p. 28.

Colectivos (shared shuttle vans) transport passengers from the airport into the city for about \$12 (U.S.), but not the other way around; you'll need to take a taxi when departing. Taxi rides to the airport average \$20-\$25.

The central bus station (Central Camionera) is southwest of downtown at Calle Jalisco and Héroes de la Independencia. Another station is on Paseo Alvaro Obregón. just south of Avenida 5 de Mayo. Autotransportes de Baja California buses provide regular service between La Paz and Tijuana-a 22-hour trip that includes stops at towns along the route. The Aguila bus line travels to San José del Cabo and Cabo San Lucas, about 209 kilometers (130 miles) south. In-town fares are inexpensive, but a knowledge of both Spanish and the city's layout is helpful.

Taxis are plentiful, especially along Paseo Alvaro Obregón. Rides within the downtown area average less than \$5 (U.S.), to the port of Pichilingue about \$15. A car will come in handy for exploring outlying beaches, but keep in mind that rental cars tend to be more expensive in Mexico than in the United States. Major car rental agencies have offices on Paseo Alvaro Obregón.

Ferry service links La Paz with the mainland ports of Mazatlán and Topolobampo, near Los Mochis. Reservations to Mazatlán and Topolobampo can be made in person at the Baja Ferries ticket office, which is downtown at Allende #1025 (corner of Allende and Rubio). Reservations also can be made at the Baja Ferries Pichilingue Terminal office. To make reservations phone 01 (800) 744-5050 (toll-free long distance within Mexico).

The ferry terminals are in Pichilingue, about 16 kilometers (10 miles) north of La Paz via Mex. 11, and are located on opposite sides of the harbor. A knowledge of Spanish is essential when making reservations, which should be booked at least a week in advance. The easiest way to buy ferry tickets is online at bajaferries.com. For additional information, see Ferry Service, page p. 36.

The southern Baja edition of the English-language Gringo Gazette has tourist-related articles and advertisements pertaining to La Paz and other cities in the state of Baja California Sur. Allende Books, on Avenida Independencia 2 blocks northeast of Plaza Constitución, stocks

English-language books. The shop also carries a nice selection of travel guides, area maps and gift items. The satellite dishes at the large hotels bring in TV stations from Mexico City as well as the United States.

Banks with ATMs are concentrated a block or two inland from Paseo Alvaro Obregón. Most major hotels offer free Wi-Fi to guests. You'll also find a handful of internet cafes along the malecón. For medical emergencies, the Hospital Especialidades Médicas is in the Fidepaz Building at the north end of town, on Mex. 1 at Km marker 5.5; phone (612) 124-0400.

November through April or May is the best time to visit La Paz, when days are warm and nights can be comparatively cool. Summer's sticky heat and humidity is uncomfortable, to say the least, despite afternoon breezes coming off the bay. Rainfall in this desert region is scant and varies from year to year, although violent tropical storms called *chubascos* bring occasional downpours in late summer or fall.

# **City Layout**

La Paz appears as somewhat of a mirage in the midst of the barren, cactus-covered foothills of southern Baja. The city spreads out from the curving shoreline of beautiful Bahía de la Paz, the largest bay along the Baja Peninsula's eastern coast. Situated at the bay's southern end, La Paz faces northwest rather than east. While this location is ideal for viewing the frequently impressive sunsets, it can be somewhat confusing when it comes to getting your bearings.

Fortunately, city streets are laid out in a simple grid pattern, oriented northwest-southeast and southwestnortheast. Hotels and tourist-oriented facilities are concentrated along Paseo Alvaro Obregón and the bayside *malecón* promenade, roughly between northwestsoutheast avenidas Sinaloa and Colegio Militar. Adjoining the bayfront is downtown, a congested maze of streets that is more easily navigated on foot than by car.

The *malecón*, a traditional feature of every Mexican port town, is the city's gathering place. The boardwalk runs parallel to Paseo Alvaro Obregón in the heart of the tourist and shopping district. A pair of wharves serve tour boats and commercial vessels. Benches and statuary along the length of the *malecón* make it the most scenic spot in La Paz, just the place for an early morning or evening walk.

Many streets are one way, although clearly marked. Besides Paseo Alvaro Obregón, the major thoroughfares are Avenida 5 de Mayo, Avenida 16 de Septiembre and Avenida Bravo. Most visitor points of interest are a few blocks inland from the waterfront, but you'll need a car for trips to the outlying beaches and the port of Pichilingue.

#### Recreation and Beaches

La Paz, like Los Cabos and Ensenada, is a sport-fishing center. Blue marlin weighing up to 1,000 pounds are found in offshore waters from mid-March through October; sailfish can be hooked from the end of May through October. Bonito, roosterfish and yellowtail are available all year. Other species sought by anglers include black marlin, cabrilla, dorado, grouper, red snapper, wahoo and yellowtail. Although the northern end of the bay still offers good fishing, the open gulf is where the real action is, especially in the waters off Isla Cerralvo southeast of the city.

Boats for a day of deep-sea fishing—either an outboard motor-powered panga or a more expensive cruiser for four or more people—usually include tackle, bait and a fishing license, but double check when you make arrangements. A panga for two or three anglers averages about \$250 (U.S.) for a day; a 30-foot cruiser accommodating four will cost about \$450-\$550. Many boats depart from beaches north and southeast of the city.

The Fishermen's Fleet operates out of the Hotel La Perla on Paseo Alvaro Obregón. Their guided charters to Isla Cerralvo, Muertos Bay and Bahía de la Paz aboard a 22-foot panga include bait, tackle, breakfast and lunch; for reservations information phone (612) 122-1313 or (408) 884-3932 (toll-free from the United States).

Diving is rewarding in the La Paz area, which has perhaps a dozen spots where coral reefs and sunken shipwrecks can be explored and sea lions, sharks and numerous tropical fish can be viewed. Among the most popular locations are Isla Espíritu Santo north of the Pichilingue Peninsula; Los Islotes, a group of islets off that island's north coast; El Bajo, a grouping of underwater rock pinnacles east of Isla Espíritu Santo; and around the northern and southern tips of Isla Cerralvo.

Sea kayaking is another popular activity. Due to its scenic qualities, numerous sheltered coves, prime diving conditions and easy shore access, Isla Espíritu Santo is one of the best kayaking destinations in Baja California. Isla la Partida, a smaller island just north, is home to a large colony of sea lions. El Mogote, a spit of sand across the bay from downtown La Paz, and Playa Balandra, a few miles north of La Paz, are good nearby destinations. Both single-seat and tandem models can be rented. A few hotels offer their guests kayaks for local use; check when you make reservations, or inquire about outfitters that provide organized kayaking excursions.

Although gray, sperm, humpback and enormous blue whales are sometimes spotted off local waters, La Paz is not considered a primary whale-watching destination. Bahía Magdalena, a shallow, protected bay on the Pacific coast about 160 miles north, offers a much better opportunity for

whale observation. Here gray whales mate and give birth from January through March.

San Diego-based Baja Expeditions offers a number of different excursions with a focus on environment, education and adventure. Most trips include accommodations, equipment, meals and a knowledgeable trip leader. Operations are based in La Paz; many trip organizers live in the city and are well acquainted with the area. The local office is at Av. Sonora #585. For more information phone (800) 843-6967 or (858) 581-3311 (toll-free from the United States and Canada).

The nicest beaches are north of the city via Mex. 11 (Carretera Pichilingue) as it heads to the northern end of the Pichilingue Peninsula. The highway is not marked, although signs indicate that you are heading in the direction of Pichilingue, the city's deep-water port, and the ferry docks. Mex. 11 continues north all the way to Playa Tecolote.

A short distance north of the tourist wharf in town is the sandy stretch of Playa El Coromuel. Parque Acuático El Coromuel has water slides, a restaurant and plenty of gringo-friendly facilities. About 13 kilometers (8 miles) north of town via Mex. 11 is Playa El Tesoro, a crescentshaped beach with some *palapas* for shade.

About 5 kilometers (3 miles) north of Pichilingue is Playa Pichilingue. Stop here for a dip in the clear blue water followed by a cold beer and some freshly grilled fish at one of the beachside *palapa* eateries. Next is Playa Balandra, which fronts a narrow inlet. In addition to a small coral reef that is one of the few good spots for snorkeling close to La Paz, this beach is known for a distinctive mushroom-shaped rock formation that balances on an almost absurdly tiny base.

At the peninsula's northern tip is Playa El Tecolote, where conditions for swimming and diving are just about ideal. The gently sloping beach is equipped with palapas, there are casual open-air restaurants, and the water is beautifully blue and crystal clear. The water sports center here rents ski boats, kayaks and other craft and also can arrange trips to Isla Espíritu Santo.

# Shopping, Dining and Nightlife

La Paz offers the savvy shopper good buys on such handicrafts as coral jewelry, seashell knickknacks, leather goods and woven baskets. Tourist-oriented shops cluster along the stretch of Paseo Alvaro Obregón between avenidas Bravo and 5 de Mayo. Antigua California, Paseo Alvaro Obregón #220 (at Avenida Arreola), carries a good selection of folk art from different parts of the country.

Ibarra's Pottery, about 6 blocks inland from the waterfront at Calle Guillermo Prieto #625, is a workshop where the Ibarra family fires pottery the old-fashioned way. Artisans carefully hand-paint exquisite floral designs on plates, mugs.

tiles and vases. At Artesanía Cuauhtémoc (The Weaver), southwest of downtown on Avenida Abasolo (Mex. 1) between calles Jalisco and Navarit, Fortunato Silva creates and sells handwoven cotton and woolen articles—rugs. tablecloths, placemats, blankets, sarapes and the like.

Local restaurants are big on steak, seafood and traditional Mexican favorites. You'll find Burger King and other fast-food franchises as well. The open-air restaurants at the beaches have a decidedly casual ambience and are good places to go for fresh grilled fish and other simply prepared seafood. See the Lodgings & Restaurants section for AAA Diamond designated dining establishments.

Nightlife here doesn't compare to Cabo San Lucas, but there are still options. Local and visiting performing arts groups take the stage at the 1,500-seat City Theater (Teatro de la Ciudad), at Miguel Legaspy and Héroes de la Independencia.

Las Varitas, on Avenida Independencia at Belisario Domínguez, is a dance club that plays everything from salsa to Mexican rock. There is a cover charge to get in. The nightclub La Cabaña, which also has a cover charge, is on the lobby floor of the Hotel Perla, on Paseo Alvaro Obregón between Avenida Arreola and Callejón La Paz. The music is a mix of salsa, disco and oldies.

The most enjoyable activity might just be taking a seat at an outdoor café along the malecón at sunset and watch the bay turn to spectacular hues of red and gold. La Terraza, at the Hotel Perla, is a good spot.

Baja California Sur State Tourism Office (Coordinadora de Promoción al Turismo): on Mex. 1 at Km marker 5.5, at the north end of town in the Fidepaz Building (near the marina); staff are helpful and bilingual. Open Mon.-Fri. 9-5. Phone: (612) 124-0100.

A tourist information booth is on Paseo Alvaro Obregón (the malecón) at Calle Nicolas Bravo. It has information about various city tour packages and is open Mon.-Fri. 9-5.

SEA & ADVENTURES, INC. (Mar Y Aventuras) excursions depart from the Posada Luna Sol Hotel near the Marina de La Paz, half a blk. w. of jct. Blvd. 5 de Febrero and Calle Abasolo. The opportunity to interact with whale sharks at close range is well worth taking this guided trip into La Paz Bay. Small lanchas holding up to 10 passengers patrol the water searching for these gentle giants, offering the opportunity to observe them at close range as they float in shallow, crystal-clear water while peacefully feasting on plankton.

Although shark sightings are not guaranteed, they are likely during the winter season, when whale sharks visit the waters off the Baja peninsula as part of their annual migration cycle. The boat also cruises past an offshore rock where you can jump in the water and snorkel with sea lions. In addition to the whale shark trip, the company organizes kayaking trips and an all-day snorkeling tour to Espiritu Santo Island.

Note: If you don't speak fluent Spanish, be sure to request an English-speaking guide; you'll get more out of the experience. The trip can also be arranged through some hotels in San José del Cabo and Cabo San Lucas: ground transportation to La Paz is provided. **Phone:** (612) 122-7039, (406) 522-7596 (from the United States), or (800) 355-7140 (from the United States).



CLUB EL MORO HOTEL & SUITES BOOK NOW

612/122-4084



Hotel. Address: Blvd Alberto Oregon #7 23010.

# COURTYARD BY MARRIOTT LA PAZ BAJA CALIFORNIA SUR BOOK NOW 612/123-1234



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Hotel. Address: KM 75 Carr a Pichilingue Col Lomas de Palmira 23010. Location: Waterfront. Facility: Meets AAA guest room security requirements. 151 units. 5 stories, interior corridors. Amenities: safes. Pool: heated outdoor. Activities: exercise room. Guest Services: valet laundry.



























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HOTEL INDIGO LA PAZ PUERTA CORTEZ BOOK NOW 612/123-6000



Contemporary Resort Hotel. Address: KM 75 Carr a Pichilingue 23010.



HOTEL SEVEN CROWN LA PAZ MALECON BOOK NOW 612/128-7788



Hotel. Address: Paseo Alvaro No 1710 Obregon y Lerdo de Tejada 23000.

### LORETO, BAJA CALIFORNIA SUR

Loreto (loh-REH-toh) dates from 1697, when a mission was founded by Jesuit padre Juan Maria Salvatierra. It became the first capital of both Alta (the present state of California) and Baja California. Loreto also was the departure point from which Junípero Serra launched his northward guest in 1769 to establish a chain of missions in Alta California. Today its impressive natural attributes and outstanding fishing attract U.S. sportsmen.

Loreto is easily reached from points north via the transpeninsular highway (Mex. 1). The airport is about 7 kilometers (4 miles) southwest of town. Nonstop flights from Los Angeles are offered by Alaska Airlines on select days of the week. Regional airline Aéreo Calafia flies from La Paz and Tijuana on small prop planes; phone (624) 143-4302, or 01 (800) 560-3949 (toll-free long distance within Mexico).

The *malecón* (boardwalk) has benches for taking in the view, but beach lovers should skip the rocky public stretches in town and head for the indented shores of Bahía Concepción, about an hour's drive north up the Gulf of California coast toward Mulegé.

At Nopolo Bay, about 8 kilometers (5 miles) south of Loreto, there is a championship 18-hole golf course at the Loreto Bay Golf Resort & Spa. The challenging course features numerous sand traps and is laid out along the Gulf of California coastline, blending into the surrounding desert and the Sierra de la Giganta mountains. For information on tee times and facilities, phone (613) 133-0016.

The Baja Big Fish Company, on the malecón 3 blocks south of the marina, has several boats and knowledgeable guides; phone (613) 135-1603. Arturo's Sport Fishing, on Calle Hidalgo between the main plaza and the marina, is a family-owned business that offers snorkeling,

kayaking and whale-watching excursions in addition to fishing trips; phone (613) 135-0766.

A boat excursion can be taken to Coronado Island, about a mile and a half offshore, part of Bay of Loreto National Marine Park. The clear, tranquil water harbors a great variety of tropical fish. The best months for snorkeling and scuba diving are June through October, when the water is warmest. Whale sightings are possible in winter. Trip arrangements can be made through local hotels or Arturo's Sport Fishing.

Few merchants in town take credit cards for payment, although both pesos and U.S. dollars are readily accepted. The Bancomer bank, on the main plaza, has an ATM; currency can be exchanged Mon.-Fri. during the morning.

Adventurous travelers can make the trip to the San Javier Mission (Misión San Javier), which is west of town; from a signed junction about 2 kilometers (1.1 miles) south of the Loreto turn-off on Mex. 1, a rough access road (recommended only for high-clearance vehicles) proceeds southwest through stunning canyon and mountain scenery for about 37 kilometers (23 miles). The beautifully restored structure of dark volcanic rock in the *mudéjar* (Moorish) style sits at the bottom of a deep valley.

The second oldest of the Jesuit missions established on the peninsula, it was founded in 1699 but not completed until 1758. The towering walls feature exemplary stonework, and the gilded altar was brought from Mexico City. It's possible to climb the winding stairs to the roof and bell tower, which offers a panoramic view of the valley below. A guided tour can be arranged through Loreto hotels or Desert and Sea Expeditions; phone (613) 135-1979 (from Mexico) or (760) 983-7581 (from U.S.).

Tourist information office: in the Palacio de Gobierno building across from the main plaza. Hours vary. Phone: (613) 135-0411.



Hotel. Address: Salvatierra No 152 23880. **APPROVED** INSPECTED @ CLEAN



Condominium. Address: Blvd Salvatierra S/N, Centro 23880. APPROVED

**BOOK NOW** 613/134-0350 LA MISION

> Boutique Hotel. Address: Rosendo Robles S/N Col Centro 23880. THREE DIAMOND

**BOOK NOW** 613/135-1162 POSADA DE LAS FLORES LORETO

Boutique Hotel. Address: Salvatierra esq Madero Col Centro 23880.

### **MEXICALI, BAJA CALIFORNIA**

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A remote and blazingly hot desert seems an unlikely location for a big city, but Baja California's second largest city has grown up in just such an environment. Mexicali (meh-hee-CAH-lih) is an unlikely metropolis developed as a market center for surrounding farms in the early 20th century. Visitors from across the border were attracted by legalized alcohol and gambling as well as by land speculation, and maquiladoras, foreign-owned businesses established in Mexican border areas because of low production costs, further bolstered the economy.

Capital of the state of Baja California, Mexicali is opposite Calexico, Calif. Mexican and U.S. Customs and Border Protection offices are open 24 hours daily.

Shops and restaurants are near the international border in an irregular rectangle bounded by avenidas Cristóbal Colón and Alvaro Obregón, the Río Nuevo and Calle C. Mexico's largest Chinatown (La Chinesca) also is near the border, concentrated south of Calzada López Mateos around avenidas Juárez and Altamirano.

Secture (Secretaría de Turismo del Estado): calzadas Montejano and Benito Juárez in the Hotel Zone (Zona Hotelera), south of Plaza Azteca. Open Mon.-Fri. 8-6, Sat. 9-1. **Phone:** (686) 566-1116.

### ROSARITO, BAJA CALIFORNIA

A Prohibition-era hideaway for Hollywood's Golden Age elite, the beach town of Rosarito (roh-sah-REE-toh) was traditionally an easy sell for local tourism boosters. Only a 29-kilometer (18-mile) drive south of the U.S./Mexico border? Check. Sunny, Southern California-type weather? Check. Fantastic fish tacos and cheap *cerveza*? Si, señor. It's not Tijuana? Perfect.

Weekends and spring break months saw bumper-tobumper traffic along Mex. 1/Boulevard Benito Juárez, Rosarito's main drag, as sun and fun seekers from San Diego and L.A. converged for tequila shooters at the massive Papas & Beer beach club, or went on a romantic horseback ride along the shore.

Rosarito is located at the junction of Mex. 1 (free) and Mex. 1-D (toll), both four lanes divided from Tijuana. The toll charge is around 31 pesos; it must be paid in cash, but dollars are accepted. Driving the free road is not recommended due to often-heavy local traffic.

Approaching from the north on the toll road, the outstanding Pacific views are periodically obstructed by highrise condo and hotel complexes, some of them halfcompleted construction projects that have been abandoned due to lack of funding. A few faded real estate "For Sale" banners flap in the breeze outside gated beachfront communities favored by American expats.

The picture brightens once you hit town. Waves tumble ashore. Local fishermen cast off from the pier. In the distant ocean haze are the jagged silhouettes of the Coronado Islands. A few gringos buzz down the beach on rented ATVs. Beach bar hucksters reel in afternoon imbibers with 2-for-1 drink specials. The weekday scene is *tranquilo* (calm), quite the opposite of the drug war mayhem depicted in the international media.

The *municipo* of Rosarito stretches more than 25 miles south to the village of La Misión, but the main tourist strip is little more than a mile long and manageable on foot. Walking the downtown area and beach is safe during the day, and the special Tourist Police (Policía Turística) force maintains a highly visible presence.

Driving from the U.S. is typically hassle free, but driving back is a different story due to potentially long waits at the border. A taxi from Tijuana to Rosarito will cost about \$35 (U.S.) one way; it's safest to use one of the designated yellow-and-white tourist taxis. Taxis are not metered; always determine the fare before you get in. In town, taxis are easily flagged down along Boulevard Benito Juárez; the main cab stand is in the center of town, across the street from the Rosarito Beach Hotel.

Located at Blvd. Juárez #31, this historic beachfront accommodation opened in 1925 and is well worth a look even if you don't spend the night. The ornate lobby is vintage Baja California, replete with arched entryways, lovely tile work, beautiful hand-painted ceilings and wall murals depicting everything from Spanish missions to mythic Zapotec gods of death.

Out the hotel's rear exit is the Rosarito Beach Hotel Pier, a 500-yard-long wooden pier supported by towering metal pylons. At pier's end, local fishermen haul up their catch. Pelicans dive-bomb for lunch around the offshore rocks. A lone surfer tucks into a nice hollow wave. Pier access is free to hotel guests; non-guests are charged 12 pesos. Just south of the pier are operators offering guided horseback rides along the beach (about \$15 U.S. per half hour) and ATV rentals (\$20 per half hour).

Plaza de los Artístas, next to the hotel's security gate, houses a few art galleries and a small wine tasting shop.

You'll also find quality jewelry, handmade furniture and handicrafts from the state of Michoacán. For those running low on cash, banks with secure, glass boothenclosed ATMs line the east side of Boulevard Juárez; withdrawals are in pesos.

If you're hunting for tacky souvenirs, curio shops line the west side of Juárez. Most shops don't take plastic, and those that do will usually add on a hefty fee, but U.S. dollars are universally accepted. The Handicrafts Market (Mercado de Artesanías), on the west side of Juárez between calles Acacias and Roble, is a maze-like shopping arcade with more than 100 vendor stalls. Merchandise ranges from cheap "Made in China" gifts to surprisingly exquisite handcrafted items.

Just north of the pier are Rosarito's three main beach bar clubs. Papas & Beer, an offshoot of the Ensenada original, is on the beach where Calle Nogal meets the sand. This mega club claims to be the biggest bar in Baja. On weekdays the place is quiet, but plenty of locals and dedicated Southern Californians still come on weekends to boogie in the faux tropical setting. Nearby are Club Corona and Club Iggy's; the latter sometimes has live music.

Carne asada fans will want to sniff out Tacos El Yaqui, a simple stand one block east of Boulevard Juárez at the corner of Calle de la Palma and Avenida Mar del Norte. Two fresh flour tortillas loaded with meat, pinto beans, guacamole, onions, cilantro and (if you dare) grilled jalapeños will set you back \$6 (U.S.).

On Memorial Day weekend, the Rosarito Art Fest features more than 100 arts and crafts booths, plus food stands and live music. Traditional Mexican eats, along with music concerts, go-karts and animal rides for the kids, add up to family fun during the Rosarito City Fair. It takes place the second half of July at Plaza San Fernando, north of the Rosarito Beach Hotel between Boulevard Juárez and the ocean.

Rosarito Tourist Office: downtown on Mex. 1 (Boulevard Juárez) at Oceana Plaza #29. The office is open Mon.-Fri. 8-6, Sat.-Sun. 9-1. Brochures, maps and tourist information also are available in the lobby of the Rosarito Beach Hotel. **Phone:** (661) 612-0200 for the tourist office.



ROSARITO BEACH HOTEL & SPA BOOK NOW 866/767-2748



Historic Resort Hotel. Address: Blvd Benito Juárez No 31.

#### WHERE TO EAT





Mexican Casual Dining. Address: Blvd Benito Juárez No 31.

#### SAN FELIPE, BAJA CALIFORNIA

Although nomadic fishermen first gravitated to the area around San Felipe (sahn feh-LEE-peh) in the mid-19th century, the town was not permanently settled until the 1920s. The completion of Mex. 5 from Mexicali in 1951 brought a steady stream of American sportsmen who have helped transform San Felipe into a major winter vacation destination. Rapid expansion that began in the 1980s has produced a slew of waterfront trailer parks. condominiums and hotels. Even so, do not expect a luxury-style resort: San Felipe's style is distinctly no-frills.

About 193 kilometers (120 miles) south of Mexicali, the town's location combines the inviting—the Gulf of California's shimmering blue waters—with the forbidding—an extremely arid desert environment. Mex. 5 south from Mexicali is in excellent condition, including an initial stretch of four-lane divided highway. Note: There aren't any gas stations between the village of La Puerta and San Felipe, a distance of some 100 miles; make sure your tank is full before starting out.

After traversing open desert, an archway heralds the arrival into town. The steep eastern flank of the Sierra San Pedro Mártir range—which includes Baja California's tallest mountain, Picacho del Diablo-is clearly visible to the west. The town spreads out under 940-foot-tall Punta San Felipe, a promontory that forms the northern end of Bahía San Felipe. Yellow-sand beaches line the coast southeastward from the crescent-shaped bayfront to Punta Estrella, about 19 kilometers (12 miles) distant. A splendid view of the town and coastline is available from the Virgin of Guadalupe Shrine, atop a hill just north of San Felipe.

The bay, along with the entire northern Gulf of California, has an extreme tidal range that often reaches more than 20 feet, requiring an experienced boater to successfully navigate the waters. At high tide waves break against the shore; at low tide it is possible to wade far out over sand and mud flats.

South of town, a paved but rough road passes the airport and continues 85 kilometers (53 miles) to Puertecitos. Along the way are turn-offs leading to vacation home communities and trailer camps, but very few motorist facilities.

About 21 kilometers (13 miles) south of San Felipe via the Gulf of California coast road is the Valley of the Giants (El Valle de Los Gigantes). Watch for the sign for Colonia Gutierrez Polanco, then take the sandy road going in the opposite direction—southwest—about 5 kilometers (3 miles). The cluster of very large, very old cardón cactuses and other desert vegetation makes for an intriguing sight. It is recommended that this excursion be made only in a sturdy, high-clearance vehicle.

San Felipe attracts campers, anglers, road racers and beachcombers. Dwellings are modest, vegetation scarce, and litter sometimes an evesore. The town attracts a rowdy crowd of motorcyclists and dune buggy fanciers on holiday weekends like Presidents Day and Thanksgiving and also during the 2 weeks around Easter; at these times San Felipe is noisy and congested. Also avoid the blistering summer months, when temperatures can soar to 120 degrees under cloudless skies. The weather November through April is much more pleasant.

At this major fishing center shrimp are caught commercially, and surf fishing and package or chartered fishing trips are available. Cabrilla, white sea bass, yellowtail, dorado and other game species are found in the gulf waters. Boat rentals range from oar-propelled pangas to large craft that can accommodate a party for several days. Local boating outfits are concentrated along Mar de Cortés, as are San Felipe's restaurants, bars and nightspots.

**Tourist information office:** downtown at Calzada Chetumal #101, at the corner of Avenida Mar de Cortés, the waterfront malecón. Phone: (686) 577-1155.

# SAN JOSÉ DEL CABO, BAJA CALIFORNIA SUR

Fronting the steely blue Gulf of California at the eastern end of the Los Cabos resort area, sedate San José del Cabo (sahn hoh-SEH dehl KAH-boh) is the anti-Cabo San Lucas (see separate listing within this region). While

young couples and rowdy college kids dance and drink themselves into a Mexi-coma near Land's End, San José attracts an older tourist crowd that prefers a more relaxed resort. That's not to say it's a sleepy Baja backwater, but—unlike hyper-Americanized Cabo—colonial roots and pockets of late 19th-century architecture remind visitors they are indeed vacationing in Mexico.

#### **Practicalities**

San José del Cabo International Airport is about 13 kilometers (8 miles) north of San José del Cabo and 48 kilometers (30 miles) northeast of Cabo San Lucas. Aeroméxico, Alaska Airlines, American, Delta and United all offer either direct or connecting flights from various U.S. cities. For additional information about the airport see the Cabo San Lucas listing; for additional information about airlines see Arriving by Air, page p. 28.

Because the Los Cabos area is spread out and expensive taxi fares will quickly add up, renting a car is a viable option if you're staying more than a few days or want to explore the surrounding area. **Note:** AAA members enjoy discounts through Hertz for vehicles booked in the United States. Consult your local AAA club or phone Hertz, (800) 654-3080. For additional information about renting a car see Car Rentals, page p. 29.

Taxis from San José del Cabo to Cabo San Lucas or the Corridor hotels are convenient but expensive, averaging \$25-\$30 depending on destination. The local Suburcabos buses are a much cheaper alternative, running regularly between the two Cabos; the fare for the 45-minute trip is 33 pesos. The Aguila/Peninsular bus line also provides service between the two towns.

Walking from the far eastern end of the beachfront hotel zone to downtown San José will take about 20 minutes. If you're staying at a hotel located west of town, you'll save time, energy and an approximate \$6 (U.S.) taxi fare by taking the bus. City buses run along Paseo San José, the wide boulevard behind the hotel zone, during daylight hours. Flag down any eastbound bus and simply tell the driver, "La Plaza, por favor." The fare is around 25 pesos per person, and exact change is appreciated.

In case of emergency dial 911 to reach local police or the fire department. There is a 24-hour medical clinic and pharmacy (Médica Los Cabos) on Calle Ignacio Zaragoza near the corner of Avenida Idelfonso Green, about 3 blocks west of the main plaza. English is spoken; phone (624) 142-2770. The Red Cross (Cruz Roja) is downtown on Boulevard Mijares, next to the post office; phone (624) 142-0316. To contact the local police at City Hall, phone (624) 142-0361.

# **City Layout**

Downtown San José is about a mile from the Gulf of California, separated from the beachfront hotel zone by a series of low hills and the condos and private homes surrounding the Mayan Palace Golf Course. Some of the narrow streets are lined with Spanish-colonial style buildings that house shops and restaurants. The orderly grid of streets is small, compact and conducive to walking.

Mex. 1 runs along the western edge of town before turning west toward Cabo San Lucas and becoming the Corridor. Another main thoroughfare is north-south Boulevard Mijares. It begins at Avenida Zaragoza and heads south to Paseo San José, which follows the waterfront. San José's hotel zone is along this wide boulevard.

Avenida Zaragoza borders the south side of Plaza Mijares. The name commemorates Mexican naval officer José Antonio Mijares, who prevailed in a bloody skirmish against U.S. forces deployed from the frigate *Portsmouth* during the Mexican-American War. On the plaza's south side a yellow clock tower rises above the Palacio Municipal (City Hall), built in 1927. Inside, offices surround a shady courtyard where you'll find racks full of tourist brochures. The east side of the square is graced with a large fountain backed by the Jardín del Los Cabaños, a half-dozen bronze busts of historical big shots. A giant Mexican flag waves overhead. There's also a small but ornate wrought-iron bandstand.

Across Avenida Miguel Hidalgo from the plaza stands the twin-steepled San José Church; it was rebuilt in 1940 on the spot where the town's original mission stood. Above the entrance is a tiled mural depicting the unwelcome fate of San José mission founder Nicolás Tamaral—being dragged to his death toward fire by Indians. The church is usually open if you want to peek inside.

#### **Beaches and Recreation**

The stretch of beach along the San José del Cabo waterfront is impressive to look at, but pounding shore breakers make it generally unsafe for swimming. Guided horseback rides along the shoreline are popular and can be booked on the beach or through your hotel.

La Playita is a calm, pretty curve of sand at Pueblo la Playa, a small fishing village about 4 kilometers (2.5 miles) east of San José and adjacent to the Puerto Los Cabos Marina. A cobbled walkway runs behind the beach, and there's an oceanfront playground for kids right on the sand. *Palapa*-shaded picnic tables, showers and restrooms are set back near the marina.



To reach La Playita, take Avenida Juárez heading east out of town, which becomes an elevated access road. Continue through several *glorietas* (traffic circles) for about 2.4 kilometers (1.5 miles) to the beach turn-off (signed "La Playa"), then take the paved beach access road about a mile.

The most popular surfing beach is Playa Costa Azul, a short distance south of San José at Mex. 1 Km marker 29. The Costa Azul Surf Shop at Km marker 28 rents boards by the day, and also offers lessons. Since surfing is a tricky art, most visitors will be content to watch the experts take on the waves from a lookout point at the top of a hill just south of the beach.

The diving and snorkeling are superb at Cabo Pulmo National Marine Park, which protects the only coral reef in the Sea of Cortez. There are several reef fingers in Pulmo Bay (Bahía Pulmo), most of which are best left to divers. However, the inner reef can be easily accessed by snorkelers.

A handful of dive shops offer tours that depart from the village of Cabo Pulmo itself. Boats stop for exceptional snorkeling off rocky Mermaid Beach (Playa La Sirenita) and then visit a sea lion colony where you'll actually swim alongside the barking beasts. The Cabo Pulmo Dive Center is a long-established local dive shop; phone (624) 141-0726, or (562) 366-0722 (from the United States).

It's also possible to reach beautiful Mermaid Beach by car and a short hike. Just five minutes south of Cabo Pulmo village, look for the well-signed turn-off to Playa Arbolitos. A short dirt road leads to the beach, where *palapa* umbrellas and good snorkeling await. To find Mermaid Beach, face the ocean and look to your right. There's a narrow unmarked trail that climbs a hill and heads south along the bluffs. The hike takes about 15 minutes **Note:** Sections of the trail are narrow, with steep drop-offs; use caution. This trail is only recommended for people in fairly good physical condition.

To reach Cabo Pulmo by car, you can take one of two routes. The paved option involves driving north out of San José on Mex. 1 toward La Paz. At the town of Las Cuevas, head east toward the coast on a paved road that eventually veers south and approaches Cabo Pulmo from the north. Only the last 10.5 kilometers (6.5 mi.) are unpaved, but can still be negotiated by a regular passenger car.

The scenic route follows the unpaved East Cape Road (usually passable in a regular car), which heads east out of San José (follow Avenida Juárez out of town), veers north, skirts the coast and affords gorgeous views of stark, cactus-studded desert hills tumbling into the deep blue Sea of Cortez. One-way drive time is between 2.5 and 3 hours. You'll see an ever-growing number of luxury

beachfront homes along the coastal road, but visitor services and gas stations are all but nonexistent.

Baja Wild offers full-day Cabo Pulmo kayak and snorkel trips that depart from the San José area and include round-trip, air-conditioned van transportation to the marine park. The company also organizes ATV, jeep and whale-watching tours. For tour fees and additional information phone (624) 122-0107 or (310) 601-7995 (from the United States).

**Note:** All beaches in Mexico are the property of the government and consequently are accessible to the public. Driving on beaches in Mexico is illegal. For information about other beaches in Los Cabos, see the Cabo San Lucas listing.

Due to a combination of game fish migration patterns, bait supply, water temperature and ocean currents, the Gordo Banks, about 10 miles east of San José del Cabo, are considered to be among the richest fishing grounds in the Gulf of California. Gordo Banks Pangas, headquartered in the village of Pueblo la Playa, offers chartered 6-hour sport-fishing trips in outboard motor-powered *pangas* that are launched from the Puerto Los Cabos marina.

Rates for a standard 22-foot *panga* holding up to three passengers begin at about \$210 (U.S.). Tackle and equipment are included; lunch, live bait and transportation to and from the launch area are not. Reservations should be made several months in advance for the October-November peak season; phone (624) 142-1147 or (619) 488-1859 (from the United States).

The nine-hole course at the Mayan Palace Beach & Golf Resort is the granddaddy of Los Cabos links. Although not the caliber of the world-class courses down the road, this public course suits duffers as well as intermediate golfers—and it's cheaper to play. Tee times are on a first-come, first-served basis; phone (624) 142-0900.

The Puerto Los Cabos Golf Club has a Jack Nicklaus signature layout, plus a second course designed by Greg Norman. Still a work in progress, nine holes of each course have been completed and can be played together for a combined 18 holes. Both courses are currently open to the public, but the Norman course will eventually be restricted to members and residents.

The expensive greens fees are somewhat mitigated by "comfort stations" at each nine, where golfers can take advantage of an unlimited bar and freshly grilled tacos. For rates and reservations, phone (624) 173-9400, 01 (800) 543-2044 (toll-free long distance within Mexico), or (877) 795-8727 (toll-free from the United States). For information about other courses see the Cabo San Lucas listing.

#### Shopping

Shops of varying quality can be found along Calle Zaragoza near Plaza Mijares, and also up and down Boulevard Mijares. Necri Fine Mexican Handicrafts, Av. Obregón #17 (between Morelos and Hidalgo), specializes in hand-painted Talavera tile, Majolica ceramics, dinnerware sets and pewter creations—all made in Mexico. Prices are a bit steep, but the craftsmanship is superior.

If you want a good deal rather than pricey quality try Curios Carmela, at the corner of Boulevard Mijares and Coronado. It's a huge store packed to the rafters with ceramic plates, glassware, blankets, toys, clothing, decorative items and cheap Mexico mementos.

More than a dozen art galleries dot Avenida Obregón and the narrow streets behind the San José Church. Easily explored on foot, the area is known as the San José del Cabo Art District, and behind its pastel storefronts you'll find some of the most interesting shopping in all of Los Cabos. A free guide map is available at the galleries.

At the corner of Avenida Obregón and Morelos, a colorful mural featuring Frida Kahlo serves as a backdrop for the gourmet coffee patio at El Armario, the selfproclaimed "cutest shop in town." Housed in an old gas station building, the gallery sells handmade folk art, unusual gift items and jewelry, plus eye-pleasing abstract paintings by up-and-coming local artists.

Old Town Gallery, Avenida Obregón #1505, features paintings by local artists and a nice selection of original crystal sculptures. The Mata Ortiz Pottery Gallery, on Obregón near Calle Morelos, sells much sought-after Mata Ortiz pottery, as well as paintings and exquisite jewelry. Across the street is Corsica Galería de Arte, which deals in contemporary works by internationally known Mexican artists like Leonardo Nierman and Manuel Felguerez. Unless you've got a few thousand extra U.S. dollars burning a hole in your pocket, you'll have to be content with simply admiring Corsica's museum-quality paintings, large-scale sculptures and various objets d'art.

Art Walk, which takes place Thursday evenings from 5-9 during the high tourist season (November through June), is a good time to check out the district. The galleries stay open late, and many provide cocktails or wine to sip as you stroll. Several also offer artist-in-residence demonstrations, and all will happily wrap purchases for shipping or carrying home.

For a more down-to-earth shopping experience, walk through the Municipal Market (Mercado Municipal), off Calle Manuel Doblado. Locals gather here to buy fish, produce and flowers. Next door, a large yellow building houses a half-dozen *lonchería* stands where you can get a fairly inexpensive lunch. Lonchería Ely dishes up outstanding *pozole* (hominy stew), while Lonchería Sonia makes a mean fish taco. Seating is at communal tables. packed with locals at lunchtime.

The outdoor Organic Market (Mercado Orgánico) offers produce, plants, flowers, eggs, cheeses, baked goods and locally prepared food like tamales. Art and craft vendors sell jewelry, textiles, wood carvings and paintings. It's open Saturdays 9-3, November through April. The market, northeast of downtown on a dirt road off Avenida Centenario, is hard to find if you're not familiar with the city; ask a local how to get there.

#### **Dining and Nightlife**

Many downtown restaurants are either on or a block or so away from Plaza Mijares. Open-air courtyards, garden patios, sidewalk tables and distant Gulf of California views all make dining out a delightfully relaxed affair. See the Lodgings & Restaurants section for AAA Diamond designated dining establishments.

Even more casual is Zippers Bar and Grill, just south of town on the road to Cabo San Lucas (Mex. 1 Km marker 28.5). This surfer and gringo hangout at Playa Costa Azul serves up burgers, fries, ribs, steaks, seafood and Mexican standards, usually with a helping of TV sports events, and you can chow down in your bathing suit if you wish.

Compared to Cabo San Lucas, nightlife in San José is downright sedate. The TVs at Shooters Sports Bar, at the corner of Boulevard Mijares and Calle Manuel Doblado, are tuned to NFL, NHL, NBA and MLB action. The Tropicana Bar & Grill at the Tropicana Inn, Blvd. Mijares #30, is a longtime local gathering place that sometimes has live music.

Baja Brewing Co., on Calle Morelos just north of Avenida Obregón (in the Art District), is owned by a couple of beer aficionados from Colorado. The on-site brewery produces impressive ales and lagers, and the kitchen (open late) turns out tasty pub grub and thin-crust pizzas. There's sports on TV as well as live salsa and reggae music on most nights.

For most visitors, however, a stroll around Plaza Mijares makes for a pleasant evening. It's safe, the trees are wrapped in twinkling lights, and the plaza is filled with vendors and families.

#### CABO AZUL, A HILTON VACATION CLUB BOOK NOW 624/163-5100



FOUR DIAMOND

INSPECTED @ CLEAN



AAA Benefit: Members save up to 10% and earn Honors points when booking AAA/CAA rates!

Resort Hotel. Address: Paseo Malecon S/N, Lote 11 Fonatur 23400. Location: Oceanfront. Facility: At night, this exotic resort comes to life with its massive flaming torches illuminating the white-washed exterior and jungle-like landscaped paths. All rooms feature lovely views and extra seating. Meets AAA guest room security requirements. 320 units, some two bedrooms, three bedrooms and kitchens. 6 stories, exterior corridors. Parking: on-site and valet. Amenities: safes. Dining: 2 restaurants, also, Javier's, see separate listing. Pool: heated outdoor. Activities: sauna, hot tub, steamroom, beach on-site, recreation programs, kids club, health club, spa. Guest **Services:** complimentary and valet laundry, rental car service.































CASA NATALIA BOUTIQUE HOTEL BOOK NOW 624/146-7100



Boutique Contemporary Hotel. Address: Blvd Mijares 4 Centro 23400.



#### DREAMS LOS CABOS SUITES GOLF RESORT & SPA BOOK NOW

624/145-7600



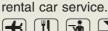


AAA Benefit: Members save up to 10% and earn World of Hyatt points when booking AAA/CAA rates!

Resort Hotel. Address: KM 185 Carr Transpeninsular 23400. Location: Oceanfront. Located at Cabo Real. Facility: Wide arches open this Spanish hacienda-style resort's airy lobby to a free-form pool, a sandy beach and the sea. Large guest rooms feature sitting areas and terraces. Meets AAA guest room security requirements. 272 units. 4-6 stories, exterior corridors. Parking: on-site and valet. Amenities: safes. Dining: 7 restaurants, nightclub, entertainment. Pool: heated outdoor. Activities: sauna, hot tub, steamroom, beach on-site, tennis, recreation programs, kids club, playground, exercise room, spa. Guest Services: valet laundry,









































#### GARZA BLANCA RESORT & SPA, LOS CABOS BOOK NOW



Hotel. Address: Carretera Transpeninsular KM 175 23405. Location: Oceanfront. Facility: This large upscale property boasts amazing ocean views, spacious luxe rooms with soaking tubs and an abundance of excellent dining options. Guests would be remiss to not experience the stunning spa. Meets AAA quest room security requirements. 315 units, some kitchens. 10 stories, interior corridors. Parking: valet only. Amenities: safes. Dining: 6 restaurants. Pool: heated outdoor. Activities: sauna, hot tub, steamroom, beach on-site, tennis, recreation programs, kids club, game room, health club, spa. Guest Services: valet laundry.



































#### GRAND VELAS BOUTIQUE HOTEL LOS CABOS BOOK NOW 624/104-7800



Boutique Contemporary Hotel. Address: Carretera Trans KM 173 23400. Location: Oceanfront. Facility: This luxurious retreat offers oversize elegant suites; most with dramatic ocean views. The property is for adults only, adding a romantic and exclusive feel. 79 units, some two bedrooms. 11 stories, interior/exterior corridors. Parking: valet only. **Terms:** age restrictions may apply. **Amenities:** safes. **Dining:** 4 restaurants. **Pool:** heated outdoor. Activities: sauna, hot tub, steamroom, beach on-site, cabanas, health club, spa. Guest Services: valet laundry.



























#### GRAND VELAS LOS CABOS BOOK NOW 624/104-9800



Contemporary Resort Hotel. Address: Carr Transpeninsular KM 17 23405. Location: Oceanfront. Facility: The ultimate in all-inclusive luxury, this property offers oversize elegant suites with dramatic ocean views. All guest units include a terrace. Multiple upscale dining options are available, 307 units, 10 stories, exterior corridors, Parking: valet only. Amenities: safes. Dining: 5 restaurants, also, Cocina de Autor, see separate listing, nightclub, entertainment. Pool: heated outdoor. Activities: sauna, hot tub, steamroom, beach on-site, recreation programs, kids club, playground, game room, lawn sports, health club, spa. Guest Services: valet laundry.



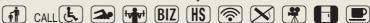
































HAMPTON INN & SUITES BY HILTON LOS CABOS BOOK NOW 624/105-4000



AAA Benefit: Members save up to 10% and earn Honors points when booking AAA/CAA rates!

SAVE Hotel. Address: Carretera Transpeninsular KM 248 Cerro Colorado 23400.



HILTON LOS CABOS BOOK NOW 624/145-6500



AAA Benefit: Members save up to 10% and earn Honors points when booking AAA/CAA rates!

SAVE Resort Hotel. Address: Carr Transpeninsular KM 195 23400.



HYATT PLACE LOS CABOS BOOK NOW 624/123-1234



HYATT PLACE. AAA Benefit: Members save up to 10% and earn World of Hyatt points when booking AAA/CAA rates! Members also receive free breakfast at Hyatt Place/Hyatt House with their World of Hyatt membership!

Hotel. Address: Paseo Malecon San Jose #128 23406. Facility: Meets AAA quest room security requirements. 157 units. 6 stories, interior corridors. Parking: on-site (fee). Amenities: safes, Pool: heated outdoor, Activities: exercise room, Guest Services: valet laundry.





























HYATT ZIVA LOS CABOS BOOK NOW 624/163-7730



FOUR DIAMOND **INSPECTED @** CLEAN

HYATT ZIVA AAA Benefit: Members save up to 10% and earn World of Hyatt points when booking AAA/CAA rates!

Resort Hotel, Address: Paseo Malecon S/N Lote-5 23405. **Location:** Oceanfront. **Facility:** This beautiful resort sits on a golden sandy beach along the Sea of Cortez. All of the spacious rooms have large showers with a rain showerhead, handheld sprayer and a separate hydro-massage tub. Meets AAA guest room security requirements. 591 units, some two bedrooms. 7 stories, exterior corridors. Parking: on-site and valet. Amenities: safes. Dining: 9 restaurants, entertainment. Pool: heated outdoor. Activities: sauna, hot tub, steamroom, cabanas, recreation programs, kids club, playground, game room, lawn sports, health club, spa. Guest Services: valet laundry.



























#### JW MARRIOTT LOS CABOS BEACH RESORT & SPA BOOK NOW 624/163-7600





AAA Benefit: Members save 5% or more and earn Marriott Bonvoy<sup>™</sup> points when booking AAA/CAA rates!

JW MARRIOTT Contemporary Resort Hotel. Address: Fraccion Hotelera FH5-C1 23403. Location: Oceanfront. Facility: The hotel's contemporary design offers views of the Sea of Cortez from every angle. Rooms feature marble floors, generous storage, upscale coffeemakers and bathrooms with rainfall showerheads. Meets AAA quest room security requirements. 254 units. 4-5 stories, exterior corridors. Parking: on-site and valet. Amenities: safes. Dining: 5 restaurants, also, Cafe des Artistes, see separate listing, entertainment. Pool: outdoor, heated outdoor. Activities: sauna, hot tub, steamroom, beach on-site, recreation programs, kids club, bicycles, game room, health



















club, spa. Guest Services: valet laundry, rental car service. (See ad starting on p. 222.)















KRYSTAL GRAND LOS CABOS BOOK NOW 624/163-4750



Contemporary Resort Hotel. Address: Carr Transpeninsular KM 29 23400.



LAS VENTANAS AL PARAISO, A ROSEWOOD RESORT, A TY WARNER

**PROPERTY BOOK NOW** 624/144-2800





Resort Hotel. Address: KM 195 Carr Transpeninsular 23405. Location: Oceanfront. Located at Cabo Real. Facility: The property's name translates to "window to paradise," a truly applicable name for this beautiful oceanfront resort. The unique, luxurious décor style embraces a native desert ambience. Meets AAA guest room security requirements. 116 units, some two bedrooms, three bedrooms, kitchens, houses and condominiums. 2 stories (no elevator), exterior corridors. Parking: valet only. Amenities: safes. Dining: 4 restaurants, also, Alebrije, Arbol, see separate listings, nightclub, entertainment. Pool: outdoor, heated outdoor. Activities: sauna, hot tub, steamroom, beach on-site, cabanas, regulation golf, tennis, recreation programs, lawn sports, health club, spa. Guest Services: valet laundry.























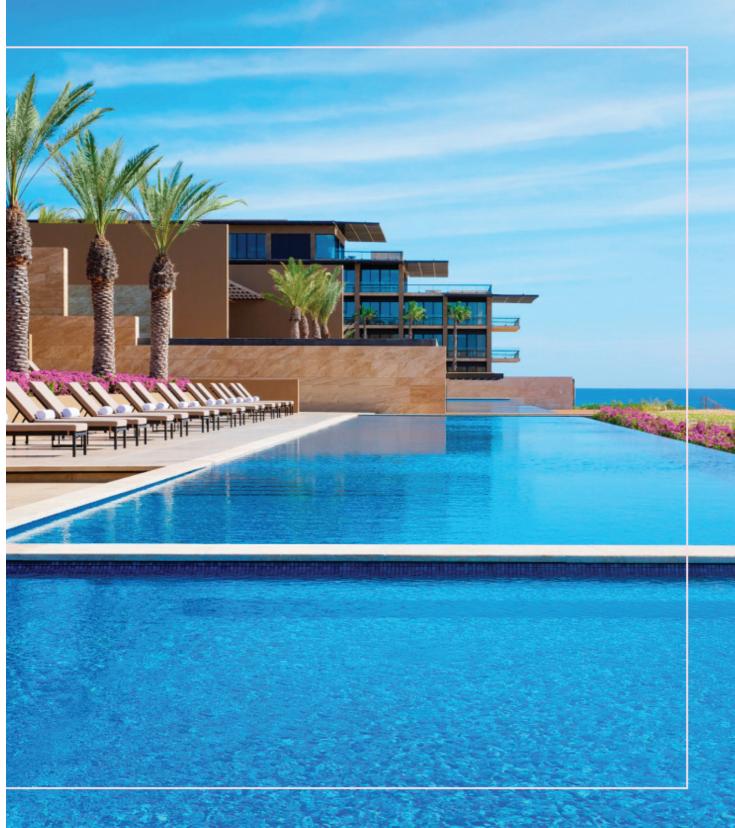














# Immerse yourself in sophisticated amenities

Experience the essence of tropical splendor at a haven perfectly situated in the heart of San Jose del Cabo.

Let the majestic beauty of the desert and the Pacific Ocean be the backdrop of an unparalleled retreat.



JW Marriott® Los Cabos Beach Resort & Spa www.marriott.com/SJDJW

# DIAMONDS TAKE THE GUESS WORK OUT OF VACATION PLANNING.

#### AAA DIAMONDS ARE NOW INSPECTED CLEAN

AAA Inspectors visit hotels and lodgings throughout the year. The Inspected Clean designation will be added to the Diamond badge as properties pass their ATP inspection.

Check back to find more Inspected Clean properties!



Visit AAA.com/Diamonds





LE BLANC SPA RESORT LOS CABOS BOOK NOW 624/163-0100



Contemporary Resort Hotel. Address: Carretera Transpeninsular KM 184 23400. Location: Oceanfront. Facility: This stunning adults-only resort is the ultimate in all-inclusive luxury. Spacious quest rooms, pampering service and a variety of upscale dining options make for a memorable stay. Meets AAA guest room security requirements. 374 units. 12 stories, exterior corridors. Parking: valet only. Terms: age restrictions may apply. Amenities: safes. Dining: 8 restaurants, entertainment. Pool: outdoor, heated outdoor. Activities: sauna, hot tub, steamroom, beach on-site, cabanas, recreation programs, health club, spa. Guest Services: valet laundry. (See ad starting on p. 226.)



























MARQUIS LOS CABOS ALL INCLUSIVE RESORT & SPA- ADULTS

**BOOK NOW** 624/144-2000



Contemporary Resort Hotel. Address: Carr Transpeninsular KM 215, Lote 74 23400.



ONE&ONLY PALMILLA BOOK NOW 624/146-7000



Resort Hotel. Address: 75 KM Carr Transpeninsular 23400.



PARADISUS LOS CABOS, ADULTS ONLY BOOK NOW 624/144-0000



Contemporary Resort Hotel. Address: KM 195 S/N Carretera Transpeninsular 23400.

ROYAL SOLARIS LOS CABOS-ALL INCLUSIVE RESORT & SPA

**BOOK NOW** 

624/145-6800

Resort Hotel. Address: Blvd San Jose, Lote 10 Campo De Golf 23400.

THREE DIAMOND INSPECTED @ CLEAN

STAY CONNECTED

#### GFT THE APP

AAA.com/mobile CAA.ca/services







Please refer to pages 10-11 for Inspected Clean details.







#### The 5-Diamond Excellence Of Le Blanc Spa Resort Los Cabos

Inhale the essence of sophistication at Le Blanc Spa Resort Los Cabos, our AAA Five-Diamond oasis along one of Mexico's most beautiful beaches. We are proud to have achieved this honor, which is only bestowed on resorts offering the most upscale amenities and exclusive service. Among the world's best adults-only resorts, our all-inclusive gem promises a luxury experience unlike anywhere

#### The Art Of Le Blanc Hospitality

Discover the pinnacle of elegance at Le Blanc Spa Resort Los Cabos, where adults-only, all-inclusive luxury means ultra-luxe amenities, exquisite flavors, and unforgettable settings. Modern decor, breathtaking vistas & white-glove pampering will transport you to a place of ultimate relaxation and wellness where the desert meets the sea and the Pacific.

Let's explore how you can elevate your stay.

#### **Explore Luxury Accommodations**

Experience sheer luxury in our 369 guest accommodations, each brimming with signature amenities and impeccable attention to detail. Unwind with lavish comforts that include personal butler service, plush bedding, a pillow and comfort menu, daily replenished minibars, in-room liquor dispensers, a welcome bottle of tequila, high-speed Wi-Fi, Smart TV with Chromecast®, BVLGARI® bathroom amenities, Lavazza® coffee maker, and more, to replenish and savor every moment.

#### Savor Perfection With Every Bite & Sip

Lead your cravings on a culinary voyage designed by master chefs who share a passion for culinary greatness. Guests can also enjoy 24-hour inroom dining. Take a trip through exquisite flavors from around the world. Explore the art of French cuisine at Lumière, Italian traditions at Bella,
Japanese favorites at Yama, succulent seafood at Ocean, brick-oven pizza at Blanc Pizza, scintillating Middle Eastern dishes at Habibi & more.
You can also savor gourmet coffee, handmade chocolates, desserts & homemade ice cream, now including vegan flavors, at K'akau.

Sip top-shelf creations at our five bars, which feature a number of high-end labels.





#### Spa & Wellness Activities

Pause life and indulge in the replenishing sanctuary of our world-class spa, featuring 25 treatment suites, a sauna, herbal steam room, chromotherapy, and a relaxation lounge to beautify, unwind, and replenish your physical and mental well-being. You can also improve your overall health with wellness activities like our hydrotherapy journey, paddle & Hatha yoga, pilates, agua spinning, personal training & more.

#### Uncover A World Of Luxury & Adventure

Find a world of discoveries across the Baja Peninsula. Sail across the sapphire sea while gazing at stunning sunsets, go off-road on desert adventures by Can-Am X3 Turbo or camel, play a round at Cabo Real Golf Club, enjoy seasonal whale watching, or simply lounge in our stunning infinity pool, with a signature cocktail in hand.





#### SECRETS PUERTO LOS CABOS GOLF & SPA RESORT BOOK NOW 624/144-2600





INSPECTED @ CLEAN



#### AAA Benefit: Members save up to 10% and earn World of Hyatt points when booking AAA/CAA rates!

Resort Hotel. Address: Ave Paseo de los Pescadores S/N 23403. Location: Oceanfront. Facility: Located in an exclusive master

planned community, this all-inclusive, adult only resort has an expansive pool area and variety of restaurants. Rooms feature smart tvs and bathrooms with double sinks. 500 units. 3-5 stories (no elevator), exterior corridors. Parking: on-site and valet. Terms: age restrictions may apply. Amenities: safes. Dining: 7 restaurants, nightclub, entertainment. Pool: heated outdoor. Activities: sauna, hot tub, steamroom, regulation golf, miniature golf, recreation programs, bicycles, game room, lawn sports, trails, health club, spa. Guest Services: valet laundry, rental car service.

































#### SOLAZ, A LUXURY COLLECTION RESORT, LOS CABOS BOOK NOW

624/144-0500





THE LUXURY COLLECTION

AAA Benefit: Members save 5% or more and earn Marriott Bonvoy<sup>™</sup> points when booking AAA/CAA rates!

Hotel. Address: Carr Transpeninsular S/N KM 185 23405. Location: Oceanfront. Facility: Dramatic architecture and a stunning oceanfront location greet guests to this upscale modern resort. Guest rooms feature

balconies with ocean views, custom-made furnishings and local artwork. Meets AAA guest room security requirements. 145 units, some two bedrooms and condominiums. 1-6 stories, exterior corridors. Parking: on-site and valet. Amenities: safes. Dining: 7 restaurants. Pool: heated outdoor. Activities: sauna, hot tub, steamroom, beach on-site, cabanas, recreation programs, kids club, health club, spa. Guest Services: valet laundry, rental car service.





























#### VIDANTA LOS CABOS BOOK NOW 624/163-4000



Resort Hotel. Address: Blvd San Jose S/N Lote 12 23406. Location: Oceanfront. Facility: Dramatic pool areas and jungle-like grounds are features at this large luxury resort. The larger units feature private plunge pools on the terrace. Guests have golf club access across the street. Meets AAA guest room security requirements. 154 units, some efficiencies. 6 stories, exterior corridors. Parking: valet only. Terms: check-in 5 pm. Amenities: safes. Dining: 4 restaurants. Pool: outdoor, heated outdoor. Activities: sauna, hot tub, steamroom, beach on-site, cabanas, regulation golf, tennis, recreation programs, health club, spa. Guest Services: valet and coin laundry, area transportation. Affiliated with Mayan Resorts.





























THE WESTIN LOS CABOS RESORT VILLAS - BAJA POINT BOOK NOW 624/142-9001





AAA Benefit: Members save 5% or more and earn Marriott Bonvoy<sup>™</sup> points when booking AAA/CAA rates!

Resort Hotel. **Address:** Carretera Transpeninsular KM 225 23400.

Location: Oceanfront. Facility: Perched on a cliff overlooking the ocean sits this intimate resort featuring spacious and modern quest rooms; some have full kitchens. Meets AAA guest room security requirements. 76 units, some condominiums. 8 stories (no elevator), exterior corridors. Parking: on-site (fee) and valet. Terms: check-in 4 pm. Amenities: safes. Pool: heated outdoor. Activities: beach on-site, exercise room. Guest Services: complimentary and valet laundry.

























THE WESTIN VACATION CLUB LOS CABOS RESORT MEXICO BOOK NOW

624/142-9000





AAA Benefit: Members save 5% or more and earn Marriott Bonvoy™ points when booking AAA/CAA rates!

Resort Condominium. Address: Carr Transpeninsular KM 225 23400. Location: Oceanfront. Facility: The signature of this resort is extraordinary architecture that creates a "window to the sea." Guest rooms are stylish and come with laundry machines. All have balconies with beautiful ocean views. Meets AAA quest room security requirements. 147 condominiums. 3-9 stories, exterior corridors. Parking: on-site (fee) and valet. Terms: check-in 4 pm. Amenities: safes. Dining: 4 restaurants. Pool: heated outdoor. Activities: sauna, hot tub, steamroom, beach on-site, tennis, recreation programs, kids club, lawn sports, picnic facilities, health club, spa. Guest Services: complimentary and valet laundry.



















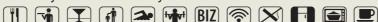
















ZADÚN, A RITZ-CARLTON RESERVE BOOK NOW 624/172-9000





AAA Benefit: Special member savings plus Marriott Bonvoy™ points when booking AAA/CAA rates!

THE RITZ-CARLTON

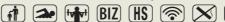
Resort Hotel. Address: Blvd Mr De Cortez S/N 23403. Location: Oceanfront. Facility: Perched on a hillside with sweeping views of the ocean, this impressive resort boasts oversize luxury quest rooms; many have a plunge pool. The dining, spa and pool areas are all world class. 113 two-bedroom units, some kitchens. 2 stories (no elevator), exterior corridors. Parking: valet only. Amenities: safes. Dining: 5 restaurants, entertainment. Pool: heated outdoor. Activities: sauna, steamroom, beach on-site, regulation golf, recreation programs, kids club, game room, health club, spa. Guest Services: valet laundry.





































ZOËTRY CASA DEL MAR BOOK NOW 624/145-7700





AAA Benefit: Members save up to 10% and earn World of Hyatt points when booking AAA/CAA rates!

Resort Hotel. Address: Carr Transpeninsular KM 195 23400. Location: Oceanfront. Located at Cabo Real. Facility: With its stone archways, massive wooden doors, courtyard and verdant garden, the

resort calls to mind a classic Mexican hacienda. Many of the oversize rooms have terraces with ocean views. Meets AAA quest room security requirements. 61 units, some two bedrooms and kitchens. 1-3 stories (no elevator), exterior corridors. Parking: on-site and valet. Amenities: safes. Dining: 3 restaurants. Pool: heated outdoor. Activities: sauna, hot tub, steamroom, beach on-site, regulation golf, tennis, recreation programs, exercise room, spa. Guest Services: valet laundry. Affiliated with Zoëtry Wellness & Spa Resorts.





























#### WHERE TO EAT



AGUA 624/146-7000



Regional Mexican Fine Dining. Address: 75 KM Carr Transpeninsular 23400.



ALEBRIJE

624/144-2800



Regional Mexican Fine Dining. Address: KM 195 Carr Transpeninsular 23400.



ARBOL 624/144-2800



Asian Fusion Fine Dining. Address: Carr Transpeninsular KM 195 23400.



CAFE DES ARTISTES 624/163-7620



Mexican Fusion Fine Dining. Address: Fracción Hotelera FH5-C1 23403.



COCINA DE AUTOR 624/104-9826



International Fine Dining. Address: Carr Transpeninsular KM 17 23400.





Mexican Fine Dining. Address: Paseo Malecon S/N, Lote 11 Fonatur 23400.





International Steak Fine Dining. Address: 75 KM Carr Transpeninsular 23400.





Italian Fine Dining. Address: Carr Transpeninsular KM 195 23447.

#### TIJUANA, BAJA CALIFORNIA

Note: For current information about safety/security issues in Tijuana, refer to the U.S. State Department website (travel.state.gov).

The First World meets the Third World in Tijuana (tee-HWAH-nah), arguably the planet's best-known international border city. The name alone conjures a blizzard of images, from white-knuckle taxi rides to throngs of college students tanked on tequila shooters.

Downtown Tijuana is by turns crass, bawdy, cheap and touristy—which of course is all part of the fun. An illicit reputation has lured Californians south of the border for more than a century, and generations of visitors have the wild stories and barroom brawl scars to prove it.

"TJ," as the city is often called, is about 18 miles south of downtown San Diego. The view to *el norte* is the orderly San Diego Trolley plaza and a tidy freeway. The view to the south is ramshackle urban sprawl behind an imposing metal border fence. Your first instinct may be to turn and run, but for adventurous travelers an interesting city awaits exploration, one that isn't as chaotic and intimidating as it first appears.

Unfortunately the drug cartel-related violence that peaked between 2007 and 2010 resulted in massive—and perhaps permanent—PR damage. About the only gringos hitting La Revo and Tijuana's Zona Río district these days are college kids from San Diego, Americans seeking inexpensive south-of-the-border medical and dental procedures, and a handful of dedicated foodies in search of eateries featured on Anthony Bourdain's Travel Channel show "No Reservations."

Most day-trippers stick close to the border or head directly to Avenida Revolución, downtown's main drag. For decades boisterous cantinas, sleazy strip joints and the dirt-cheapest of souvenirs ruled on "La Revo." And while you can still knock back one too many margaritas at a loud nightspot or score a \$5 Che Guevara poncho, the avenue also has wide sidewalks dotted with trees and wrought-iron benches.

Matches are a thing of the distant past at the Jai Alai Palace (Frontón Palacio), at the corner of Calle 7 and Avenida Revolución, but the building itself remains a Tijuana landmark, a Moorish-inspired structure with tile mosaics adorning its front. Now it's a venue for concerts, boxing and *lucha libre* (wrestling) matches. Next to the building is a Caliente Sportsbook betting facility. Wagers can be placed for most major U.S. and Latin American sporting events; multiple big-screen TVs broadcast the action. There are a couple of Caliente Sportsbook locations within walking distance of the border.

Greyhound racing takes place at the Caliente Racetrack (Hipódromo de Caliente), about 5 kilometers (3 miles) east of downtown off Boulevard Agua Caliente. The first post time at matinee races is 1:30 p.m.; evening races begin at 7:45. General admission is free. Race days vary by season; check race forms or the Caliente website for additional information, or phone (619) 941-3190.

Although Tijuana remains on the U.S. State Department's travel warning list, currently the Avenida Revolución tourist zone doesn't feel any more dangerous than the downtown area of a major U.S. city. Travelers have varying comfort levels, however, and if the mere thought of visiting Tijuana makes you nervous, you'll probably want to stay away.

If you do choose to cross the border, be aware that as one of the few tourists walking La Revo, you'll be constantly approached by nightclub barkers and souvenir vendors. They're harmless, but the aggressive solicitations can be annoying in the extreme.

Please refer to pages 10-11 for Inspected Clean details.

#### **Practicalities**

Tijuana International Airport is on the eastern edge of the city near the Otay Mesa border crossing. Volaris offers direct flights from the United States. Other airlines providing service to the airport include Aeroméxico. For additional information about airlines see Arriving by Air, page p. 28.

Colectivos (shared shuttle vans) and taxis provide transportation to downtown hotels. Colectivo fares are about \$5 (U.S.). Taxis are more expensive; fares are posted at the counters where you purchase tickets.

The Cross Border Xpress (CBX) pedestrian skybridge links Tijuana International with a CBX terminal in Otay Mesa, Calif. The 390-foot-long, purple-hued bridge arches over the U.S./Mexico border fence. It is accessible only to ticketed airline passengers flying out within 24 hours; both a boarding pass and a CBX ticket must be presented to use the bridge. A border crossing checkpoint also operates, with the same protocols as at land crossings in effect. The bridge is open daily 24 hours. Late January to late May and September through October, a one-way ticket is \$19 (U.S.), round-trip ticket \$35. Mid-November to mid-January, a one-way ticket is \$26 (U.S.), round-trip ticket \$46. Tickets can be used up to 1 year after purchase. Passengers must carry their own luggage. CBX shuttles provide service from the Otay Mesa terminal to San Ysidro and the Santa Fe Train Station in downtown San Diego; fares are \$6 (U.S.) and \$11, respectively.

Greyhound buses travel frequently between Tijuana and San Diego; for fare and schedule information phone (800) 231-2222 (from the United States). Tijuana's Central Bus Terminal (Centro de Autobuses) is southeast of downtown on Boulevard Lázaro Cárdenas. Frequent passenger service is available to cities in the state of Baja California and Southern California. For additional information about buses see Bus Service, page p. 36.

Five Star Tours offers charter shuttle service and bus tours from San Diego to downtown Tijuana as well as Rosarito, Ensenada and Guadalupe Valley wineries. Sightseeing tours depart from San Diego's Amtrak depot at Broadway and Kettner Boulevard. For additional details, schedule and fare information phone (877) 704-0514 (in the United States).

For day visitors who want to avoid traffic congestion and the hassle of finding a parking space, it's much more convenient to park on the U.S. side of the border and enter the city on foot via the Puerta Este Mexico-San Ysidro customs facility. This three-story building is on the east side of I-5 (east of the northbound vehicle lanes leading into San Ysidro). U.S. citizens and Mexican nationals are processed in separate lines. a valid passport is required in order to enter Mexico.

Yellow tourist taxis are not metered. Always ask how much the fare is ("Cuanto?") and state your destination before getting in, as drivers may try to get more money out of tourists or take you somewhere other than where you want to go.

Fares from the border to Avenida Revolución and the Zona Río should run about \$6 to \$7 (U.S.). Within the downtown area fares are \$4 to \$5; from downtown to the racetrack about \$10; and to the airport or Bullring-by-the-Sea about \$15.

If you're crossing the border in your vehicle, most shopping centers have free parking lots, and there are pay lots along Avenida Revolución downtown; either option is preferable to parking on the street.

In addition to the yellow tourist taxis, there are red-and-white *taxis libres*, which are metered. They travel all over town, and the fare is often a little cheaper than the set rates charged by the tourist taxis. "Route taxis" are solid-colored (red, brown, etc.) *colectivo* cabs that follow set routes and are mainly used by locals.

The weather in Tijuana is similar to that in southern California—mild, overcast and rather wet in winter, warm and dry in summer. Daily maximums are usually in the 60s during the winter months, rising to the low 80s in summer. While there are occasional hot spells, the moderating influence of the Pacific Ocean largely spares the city from the blazing temperatures common in many other parts of Baja. Precipitation averages only about 10 inches a year, with almost all of it occurring during the winter; from May through September practically no rain falls.

#### **Border Tips**

There are two border crossings—at Tijuana-San Ysidro and at Otay Mesa, just east of Tijuana International Airport and south of SR 117 (Otay Mesa Road). U.S. Customs and Border Protection offices are open 24 hours daily. Mexican customs offices are open Mon.-Fri. 8 a.m.-9 p.m., Sat. 8-5. Both crossings are open to travelers daily 24 hours. For additional information see the Border Information section in the back of this guide.

The Tijuana-San Ysidro border crossing complex recently completed a \$740 million renovation. The major change for U.S. citizens visiting for the day on foot was the opening of the Puerta Este Mexico-San Ysidro Mexican customs facility, which replaced the former pedestrian walkway into Mexico. The three-story building is located on the east side of I-5 (east of the northbound vehicle lanes leading into San Ysidro). Foreigners (extranjeros) are required to present a valid passport in order to enter Mexico.

Crossing the border by car south into Tijuana or north returning to the United States can sometimes involve significant delays due to enhanced security measures meant to curb the flow of illegal firearms and drug cartel cash. Mexican customs officials may conduct thorough vehicle searches, including X-rays.

Travelers also are likely to encounter routine backups in the morning and late afternoon on weekdays, as thousands of commuters travel between their Tijuana homes and jobs on the U.S. side of the border. Friday afternoon backups are especially common. The best times to cross the border north into the United States are in the very early morning and after 8 p.m.

Crossing on or around major holidays—Memorial Day, July 4, Labor Day, Thanksgiving and Christmas—also can entail long waits. The 2-week college spring break, the first 2 weeks of December and Mexican holidays are other times when significant delays can be expected.

For day visitors walking across, there are several parking lots in San Ysidro within minutes of the border. Border Station Parking, next to the San Diego Factory Outlet Center, is fenced, lighted, has surveillance equipment and is open and attended 24 hours daily. The per-day rate Mon.-Thurs. is \$9, Fri.-Sun. \$18 (cash only; credit cards are not accepted). Keep in mind that if you exit the lot after 10 a.m. the day after you park, you will be charged an additional day. For additional details, phone (619) 428-9477.

San Diego Trolley's blue line provides transportation to the San Ysidro station (at East Beyer Boulevard and East San Ysidro Boulevard) from various downtown San Diego stations, including the Santa Fe Depot, America Plaza (West C Street and Kettner Boulevard), Civic Center (C Street and 3rd Avenue) and 5th Avenue (5th Avenue and C Street at the north end of the Gaslamp Quarter).

There are public parking lots at each station; daily rates range from \$7 to \$10. One-way fare from downtown San Diego is \$2.50; over 59, \$1.25. Day passes good for unlimited trolley rides are \$5. Trolley tickets are available from self-serve kiosks at each stop. Phone (619) 557-4555 customer service, (619) 685-4900 for recorded route and schedule information, or TTY (619) 234-5005 (southern San Diego County). Closed Thanksgiving and Christmas.

#### **City Layout**

If you're driving, you'll enter Mexico at the Puerto Mexico El Chaparral vehicle crossing. To get to Avenida Revolución and the Zona Río neighborhood, move to the far left-hand lanes and follow the "Zona Centro" signs. If you're heading toward Playas de Tijuana and/or Rosarito/Ensenada, immediately move to the far righthand lanes and follow the signs to access the Mex 1-D toll highway. If you're headed for the airport, stick to the middle lanes.

Downtown Tijuana (El Centro) is less than a mile from the San Ysidro border crossing. The Monument Arch (Arco Monumental, also called Reloj Monumental) marks the north end of Avenida Revolución, the main thoroughfare. Running south for some 10 blocks, "La Revo" is packed with bars, restaurants, discount pharmacies and loads of souvenir stands and vendors selling everything from stuffed Tweety birds to Bob Marley paintings to San Diego Padres blankets.

Streets in the immediate border vicinity, plus north-south Revolución and Avenida Constitución, are all very congested, and traffic signals are not always readily visible. The traffic circles, or *glorietas*, along northwest-southeast Paseo de los Héroes and Paseo de Tijuana also can be confusing; always bear right when entering a traffic circle, following the flow of traffic counterclockwise. There are many one-way street signs as well, so make sure you have an up-to-date downtown street map.

In the decades before cartel violence scared off most Americans, TJ's famed "zonkeys" (burros painted with black and white zebra stripes) were a common sight on every other corner. Their handlers urged tourists to don a giant sombrero and pose for a photo on the poor burro's back.

These days, however, the spray-painted beasts are an endangered species and part of a wider trend—the downturn in tourism that has also encouraged residents to reclaim the heart of their city. The nightlife renaissance along La Revo and adjacent Calle 6 (La Sexta) is all about young Mexican artists and musicians conversing at coffeehouses rather than drunk gringos trading punches outside the strip clubs of yore.

About a mile southeast of Avenida Revolución is the Zona Río. Along wide Paseo de los Héroes, four massive monuments stand at traffic circles. The most unexpected, a towering statue of Abraham Lincoln, was a gift from U.S. president Jimmy Carter. Many tourists never visit the Zona Río, but upscale restaurants, a contemporary shopping mall and an impressive cultural center make it the sophisticated flip side of brash La Revo.

Divided, fully access-controlled Mex 1-D provides a quick and safe route to Ensenada and points south and is preferable to Mex. 1, the older, free roadway. From the international border, it proceeds west to Playas de Tijuana, paralleling the border fence and bypassing much of Tijuana's congestion (follow the "Ensenada Cuota" signs along Calle Internacional). At Playas de Tijuana Mex. 1-D turns south, with the ocean in view along most of the drive to Ensenada. There are three toll plazas between the two cities. Toll highway Mex. 2-D runs parallel to the border from Tijuana east to Mexicali.

#### **Shopping**

Avenida Revolución is lined with souvenir stalls and maze-like arcades filled with curio shops. Although many have closed in recent years, there are still enough left to keep browsers busy. Shopkeepers call out from doorways or pace the sidewalk pleading with you to stop and take a look. And no matter what the item, they always have "the best price, amigo."

Keep expectations in mind; if you're searching for authentic silver jewelry instead of a simple trinket, avoid the street vendors whose arms are garlanded with necklaces. Leather boots, shoes, sandals, luggage, purses, wallets, briefcases, belts and jackets can all be bargained for—but again, evaluate quality before committing your dollars.

A standout shop with fixed prices is The Emporium, on Avenida Revolución near Calle 4. where you'll find a nice selection of silver jewelry and stained glass, Oaxacan wood carvings and other examples of Mexican folk art. Hand Art, a block north on Avenida Revolución between calles 3 and 4, specializes in traditional, handembroidered men's and women's clothing, along with lovely handmade tablecloths.

If you'd rather browse in a more concentrated area and avoid the roving vendors, outdoor Plaza Río Tijuana, along Paseo de los Héroes next to the Tijuana Cultural Center, has shops, restaurants, several department stores and a movie theater multiplex. Baseball fans will find a San Diego Padres team store selling discounted logo gear.

A block southwest of the cultural center on Avenida Independencia is the Hidalgo Market (Mercado M. Hidalgo). This lively public market is filled with bins of fresh produce, heaps of fresh and dried chiles, a mind-boggling array of spices and candy, and craft stalls that feature, among many other things, a great selection of piñatas.

Pueblo Amigo, a 5-minute walk from the border, has shops, restaurants, nightspots and a Caliente Sportsbook betting facility. At Plaza Viva Tijuana, just across the border on the way to Avenida Revolución, there are craft stalls, curio shops, liquor stores and a few casual bars.

The Mexican peso and the American dollar are practically interchangeable in Tijuana, and visitors rarely have to worry about currency exchange. Haggling is expected if you're buying from street vendors or at open-air stalls; in more established shops, ask if bargaining is accepted. The only ground rule is to maintain a serious yet light-hearted approach, for a merchant's initial offering price

will usually be about twice what the item is worth. Some stores accept U.S. credit cards.

#### **Dining and Nightlife**

A Tijuana time warp not to be missed, Caesar's Restaurante Bar, on Avenida Revolución between calles 4 and 5, is a good choice for a relaxed drink and bite in a classy atmosphere that feels more like Old Hollywood than tawdry TJ. Opened in 1927, its claim to fame is inventing the Caesar salad, which is prepared at your table. Locally brewed *cervezas* (try the dark *morena*) are best enjoyed at the polished wood bar, backed by antique espresso machines.

Restaurante Chiki Jai, Av. Revolución #1388 (across Calle 7 from the former Jai Alai Palace building; look for the classic blue-and-white tiled facade) has been a La Revo fixture since 1947. Excellent Spanish dishes are served in a cozy dining room; try the seafood *paella* or a freshly grilled fish fillet. If it's a nice day, sit at one of the half-dozen sidewalk tables for two.

Street tacos are cheap, filling and often better than what you'll find in restaurants; look for food that is hot and freshly prepared. Those in the know head for Las Ahumaderas (Spanish for "the smokehouses"), a string of six connected taco stands near the Zona Río on Avenida Prieto (about a block south of Boulevard Agua Caliente). They can be tricky to find on your own, so definitely take a taxi; every cabbie knows the place. One-way fare from La Revo should run about \$5 to \$6 (a buck or two more from the border).

In business since 1960, these open-air joints prepare taco and *torta* meats on simple wood-burning grills that give everything—from carne asada to chorizo—a fantastic mesquite flavor. There are also exotic fillings like *cabeza* (cow head meat) and *lengua* (beef tongue), plus tender *al pastor* (pork) cooked on a proper rotisserie spit—difficult to find in the states. Grab a counter stool (the "El Paisa" and "Las 3 Salsas" stands are best) and experience taco heaven. All are inexpensive and cash only.

If you're leery of street food, stateside franchises like TGI Friday's, Burger King, McDonalds and Starbucks can be found in Tijuana.

When deciding what to tip in restaurants, do not include the 11 percent IVA tax that is automatically added to the check. A 20 percent tip is not expected in Mexico; 10 percent is acceptable, unless you feel the service has been truly outstanding. See the Lodgings & Restaurants section for AAA Diamond designated dining establishments.

Loud music—both recorded and live—booms from a handful of clubs on Avenida Revolución Thursday through Saturday nights. Shills stationed at every door lure potential customers with free drink cards and frequent shouts of

"\$1 beers!" Traditionally high cover charges have also dropped in recent years.

If thumping dance beats aren't your thing, party bars are a good alternative. Local institution Tia Juana Tilly's, next to the Jai Alai Palace on Avenida Revolución at Calle 7, attracts an all-ages crowd with standard Mexican dishes. strong margaritas and fun waiters. During the day and early evening, sports fans gather at the sleek El Copeo bar (Av. Revolución #1240, near the corner of Calle 6), which is loaded with HDTVs.

Feeling lucky? Casino Caliente, Avenida Revolución between calles 3 and 4, has rows of video slot machines to reward or rob you of a few pesos. Note: To enter the casino you'll need to pass through a security metal detector. Also, smoking is not permitted.

The nightlife scene along Calle 6 (aka "La Sexta") stretches for a few blocks both east and west of Avenida Revolución. The center of TJ's bar and nightclub rebirth is a hangout for the city's young artists, musicians and DJs. La Mezcalera (Calle 6 #8267) is a trendy, colorful spot where friends chill over mezcal cocktails.

If you crave the classic Tijuana dive bar experience, make your drinking destination El Dandy Del Sur (Calle 6 #8274, just east of La Revo). Although the exterior looks sketchy, once inside you'll knock back cheap drinks alongside a friendly mix of Mexican hipsters, local borrachos (drunks) and a few tourists. If dance clubs are your thing, walk the street and take your pick.

Note: While Tijuana promotes fun, remember that you are in a foreign country where different rules and laws are in effect. The police invariably arrest those who are inebriated and causing a disturbance in public, and nothing will ruin a vacation like a night in a Mexican jail and the ensuing bureaucratic red tape to get out.

TIJUANA CULTURAL CENTER (Centro Cultural Tijuana, or CECUT) is on Paseo de los Héroes between calles Javier Mina and Centenario, just n. of the Plaza Río shopping center in the Zona Río section of downtown. This modern, well-maintained cultural/museum complex is a refreshing contrast to Tijuana's raucous bars and myriad souvenir stands. It includes a history museum, an aquarium, the giant, orb-shaped Cine IMAX theater (with daily showings in English), a 1,000-seat performing arts theater (Sala de Espectáculos), a photography gallery, the El Cubo temporary exhibit gallery, a bookstore and an outdoor sculpture garden (Jardín Caracol).

The Museum of the Californias (Museo de las Californias) has varied exhibits on the Baja peninsula's natural history, the Spanish conquest of Mexico (including a large-scale replica of a 16th-century sailing ship), scale models of Baja missions and historical artifacts from bowls, baskets and battle armor to flags, antique mining tools, period weaponry and hand-drawn maps.

An exhibit about the history of Tijuana features a panoramic rendering of downtown TJ circa 1924, vintage postcards and restaurant menus, bullfight posters and other memorabilia. Exhibit information is given in both Spanish and English. A children's interactive play area has a Spanish galleon that kids can climb inside and a playroom with tables for coloring and other activities.

At the rear of the complex is a dark, cave-like aquarium displaying more than 500 aquatic species, including many native to Baja California waters. A few dozen tanks hold everything from eels and seahorses to small sharks and rays; background information is provided in both Spanish and English.

Sunday jazz, pop and rock concerts take place on the paved concourse in front of the main entrance, which also is the setting for art and craft fairs and other events. "Baja P" buses drop passengers off here from the border. Yellow tourist taxi fare from the border is about \$6 (U.S.).

Phone: (664) 687-9650.





AVID HOTEL TIJUANA-OTAY, AN IHG HOTEL **BOOK NOW** 664/512-6200



Hotel. Address: Calle Ing Juan Ojeda Robles 14802 Col.



BAJA INN LA MESA BOOK NOW

664/681-6522



Motel. Address: Blvd Diaz Gustavo Ordaz No 12828 22440. Location: Located in La Mesa area; near casino race course. Facility: 122 units. 1-3 stories (no elevator), interior/exterior corridors. Bath: shower only. Pool: heated outdoor. Activities: exercise room. Guest Services: valet and coin laundry, area transportation.









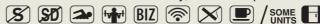


















BAJA INN RIO BOOK NOW

664/684-8644



Hotel. Address: Blvd Rodolfo Sanchez Taboada No 10606 22320. Facility: 130 units. 3 stories (no elevator), exterior corridors. Pool: heated outdoor. Activities: exercise room. Guest Services: valet laundry, area transportation.

























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Hotel. Address: Blvd Cuauhtemoc Sur No 213 Col Davila.



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Hotel. Address: Jose Ma via Velasco 1409-A, Zona Rio.



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QUARTZ HOTEL & SPA BOOK NOW 664/862-8200



FOUR DIAMOND INSPECTED @ CLEAN Hotel. Address: Ave Paseo del Centenario 9580 22320. Facility: Located close to the border and attached to the NewCity Medical Plaza, this is the best recovery hotel in the city. The luxurious rooms feature floor-to-ceiling windows showcasing views of the city. 155 units, some two bedrooms and kitchens. 11 stories, interior corridors. Parking: on-site (fee) and valet. Amenities: safes. Dining: 2 restaurants. Pool: heated outdoor. Activities: hot tub, exercise room, spa. Guest Services: valet laundry, area transportation.



























#### WHERE TO EAT



MISION 19 664/634-2493



Mexican Fine Dining. Address: Calle Mision de San Javier 10643, 2nd Floor.

#### TODOS SANTOS, BAJA CALIFORNIA SUR

An old farming and fishing community about 80 kilometers (50 miles) north of Cabo San Lucas, Todos Santos (TOH-dos SAHN-tos) was long isolated from visitors. That changed in 1986 with the completion of Mex. 19 from La Paz south to Cabo San Lucas. Even though large-scale resort development has begun to take shape south of town, Todos Santos ("All Saints") retains a relaxed air and the charms of a traditional Mexican town.

Located just south of the Tropic of Cancer, Todos Santos is tropical but not quite as torrid as the towns lying next to the warm Gulf of California waters. Underground water from the Sierra de la Laguna range, which rises to the east, provides irrigation for groves of mangoes, papayas and avocados. The town's 19th-century status as a sugar cane producer is evidenced by the ruins of a few sugar mills.

The peak tourist season is from October through February; many businesses are closed or open irregular hours from July through September, when the weather is hotter and more humid and the beaches are plagued by mosquitos. Occurring over the second weekend of October, the 4-day Fiesta Todos Santos celebrates the town's 1723 founding with live music, dancing and sports competitions.

A persistent urban legend claims that the Hotel California, on Calle Juárez, is the lodging with "plenty of room" referred to in the Eagles song and shown on the cover of the band's same-named 1976 album. The Hotel California opened in 1950, closed in the late 1990s for an extensive renovation and reopened in 2004. Standing under the arches is a popular photo op. The La Coronela Restaurant has live music on Saturday evenings.

Café Todos Santos, on Calle Centenario at Calle Topete (across from the Todos Santos Inn), is where many visitors head for breakfast. The cafe latte comes in a cup the size of a bowl; pair it with a cinnamon bun, sit in the charming garden and while away the morning.

Local galleries include Galería de Todos Santos, on Juárez next to the Centro Cultural (Cultural Center) between calles Obregón and Topete, where works by Mexican and American artists are on display. Galería Santa Fe, Centenario #4 next to Café Santa Fe, has a delightful collection of Mexican folk art.

About 3 kilometers (2 miles) west of town on a dirt road is Playa Punta Lobos. Here local fishermen embark in their pangas for the day's catch; visitors can enjoy the dramatic Pacific surf. South of town via Mex. 19, dirt-road turn-offs offer access to unspoiled, unpopulated beaches—good for surfing—along the rocky coastline. Just 23 kilometers (14 miles) east the Sierra de la Laguna Mountains rise to 6,000 feet; pack trips to explore the area can be arranged in town.



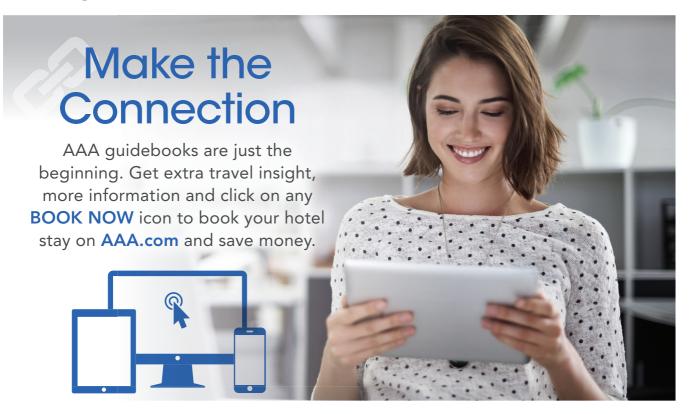
GUAYCURA BOUTIQUE HOTEL & SPA BOOK NOW 612/175-0800

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HOTEL SAN CRISTOBAL BOOK NOW 612/175-1530

THREE DIAMOND INSPECTED @ CLEAN Boutique Hotel. Address: Carretera Federal N°19, KM 54+800 23300.





Find this symbol for further information or relevant contact.







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# **Northwestern Mexico**

orthwestern Mexico encompasses three of the country's four largest states—Chihuahua, Durango and Sonora—and vast expanses of insurmountable territory. Desolate plateaus stretch for miles, and the sun sets over panoramic mountain and desert vistas. Irrigated river valleys produce flourishing crops of cotton, peanuts, sugar cane, tobacco, fruits and vegetables, and extensive ranchlands in Sonora provide the country's best beef cattle.

One way to view the rugged scenery is from the window of a passenger train traversing the Copper Canyon region, a complex of interconnected canyons almost four times larger and some 280 feet deeper than the Grand Canyon. Copper Canyon travel packages feature coach tours, and some also include guided hiking or horseback riding expeditions.

Durango's historic center is filled with carefully preserved 17th- and 18th-century buildings. San Carlos is a laid-back beach resort, while Puerto Peñasco—better known as Rocky Point—is especially popular with nearby California and Arizona residents due to its easy accessibility.

For a taste of authentic Mexico head to Alamos, in the foothills of the Sierra Madre Occidental. About 52 kilometers (32 miles) east of Navojoa via Mex. 10, it's a 5-hour drive from the U.S. border at Nogales. Cottonwood trees and restored colonial-era mansions make this expat community an oasis in the otherwise barren landscape of coastal Sonora.

AAA recommends that travelers consult online U.S. State Department travel advisories when planning traveling abroad. Find this information at travel.state.gov/ content/passports/en/country/mexico.html.

#### **ALAMOS, SONORA**

Note: For current information about safety/security issues in Alamos, refer to the U.S. State Department website (travel.state.gov).

Alamos (AH-lah-mohs), an early Spanish stronghold in the vastness of northwestern Mexico, was once a remote settlement that supplied services for regional silver-mining operations. The mines were all but depleted by the turn of the 20th century; the town's wealthier citizens pulled up stakes, leaving their colonial-style mansions to deteriorate. A turnaround took place following World War II, when U.S. artists and expats began restoring the old homes to their former glory.

On arcaded Plaza de Armas, the main square, stand the Church of the Immaculate Conception (Iglesia de la Inmaculada Concepción) and City Hall (Palacio Municipal). Mocuzari Dam (Presa Mocuzari), accessed by a gravel road branching north off Mex. 10, offers fishing and outdoor recreation activities.

**Tourist information office:** Calle Guadalupe Victoria #5. Open daily 9-7 (reduced hours in summer). Phone: (647) 428-1371

#### CHIHUAHUA, CHIHUAHUA

Note: For current information about safety/security issues in Chihuahua, refer to the U.S. State Department website (travel.state.gov).

Chihuahua has figured prominently in Mexico's history despite its geographical isolation. Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla, champion of Mexican independence, was executed here in 1811. It served as headquarters for Benito Juárez when French troops invaded Mexico between 1862 and 1867. Outlaw Pancho Villa frequented the surrounding countryside in the early 20th century and once captured the city by disguising his men as peasants going to market.

Industrial plants clog Chihuahua's outskirts, but like many Mexican cities it has a well-preserved historic center that manages to evoke a bit of 19th-century atmosphere. Downtown is divided by northwest/southeast Avenida Independencia; Plaza de Armas, the main square, is a block below this street. Take a taxi to reach such outlying points of interest as the Museum of the Revolution (see attraction listing).

Rising from the plaza is a 115-foot-tall marble column topped by the bronze Angel of Freedom. The statue stands on a slowly revolving base; at night a laser beam shoots out from the angel's sword. About 3 blocks northwest of Plaza de Armas at Av. Juárez #321 is the Juárez House (Casa de Juárez), also known as the Museum of the Republican Loyalty. Between October 1864 and December 1866 president Benito Juárez took refuge in this house while in exile during the brief reign of Archduke Maximilian. It exhibits historic objects, documents signed by Juárez and a replica of the carriage he rode in during a trip through the state. The museum is open Tues.-Sun. 9-6; phone (614) 410-4258.

The small Temple of Santa Rita, Calle 10 de Mayo #1601-A, Colonia Santa Rita, is very significant for Chihuahuans, who consider St. Rita the city's patroness. The site was originally occupied by a hacienda and a smelting plant. The daughter of a general who acquired the property had a chapel built in honor of Santa Rita. In 1837 it became a hospice for the poor, initiating the popular devotion for Santa Rita. The chapel was restored in 1949 and retains its original beams.

The family-oriented Santa Rita Fair, which takes place the last 2 weeks in May, has an old-fashioned midway with rides and regional food vendors, along with a full schedule of cultural events, dances and live entertainment.

The city's ancient aqueduct was begun in 1706; prior to its construction canoes carried water from the Chuvíscar River to a smelting hacienda. The ditches dug for the canoes provided the foundation for a stone aqueduct completed in 1854; some of the semicircular arches can still be seen.

Lerdo Park, on Paseo Bolívar southeast of Plaza de Armas, is the scene of Sunday concerts. Seasonal Sunday afternoon bullfights take place at the 7,500-seat Plaza La Esperanza. For a good selection of Tarahumara and other regional crafts, visit the House of Crafts of the State of Chihuahua (Casa de las Artesanías del Estado de Chihuahua), at Av. Niños Heroes #1101 (near the Federal Palace). The shop is closed Sunday; phone (614) 437-1292.

The El Tarahumara Trolley is a convenient way to see the sights. Service begins in front of the city's cathedral, facing the main plaza; the 19-passenger trolley completes the tour loop in 1 hour and runs Tues.-Sat. 10-6, Sun. 10-3. One ticket allows passengers to get on and off at different stops up to four times in the same day; the fare is 100 pesos per person.

Day trips can be made to Aquiles Serdán (also known as Santa Eulalia), east of the city via Mex. 45, and to Aldama, north via Mex. 16. Reputedly the oldest mining town in northern Mexico, Santa Eulalia has been restored and has a cathedral, the Templo de Santa Eulalia de Mérida, that contains impressive religious artwork. Near Aldama are the ruins of the Santa Ana de Chinarras Mission, founded by Jesuits in 1717. These highways run through desert areas with very few facilities; driving at night is not recommended.

Chihuahua State Tourism Office (Información Turística del Estado): On the ground floor of the Government Palace building, located on the n. side of Plaza Hidalgo at Calle Aldama and Calle Venustiano Carranza. Phone: (614) 429-3596, or 01 (800) 508-0111 (toll-free long distance within Mexico).

GOVERNMENT PALACE (Palacio de Gobierno) is a block s. of the Chihuahua House Museum, on the n. side of Plaza Hidalgo at Calle Aldama and Calle Venustiano Carranza. The Chihuahua state capitol was built 1881-92; a third floor was added during reconstruction after a 1941 fire destroyed a large part of the building. Inside are enormous archways, a large central patio and first-floor walls covered with noteworthy murals depicting the state's history. A beautiful stained-glass window above the main staircase illustrates themes of law and justice.

It was here that Father Miguel Hidalgo was executed by firing squad in 1811 during the War of Independence. The Nation's Altar (Altar de la Patria) on the ground floor marks the exact spot where he died. The Hidalgo Museum has a re-creation of the church facade in Dolores Hidalgo from which the priest turned freedom fighter issued his call for independence, while the Gallery of Arms displays an impressive array of weapons. Both museums incorporate state-of-the-art interactive media displays.

Time: Allow 1 hour minimum.

HISTORICAL MUSEUM OF THE REVOLUTION (Museo Histórico de la Revolución) is about 1 km (.6 mi.) s. of the historic city center at Calle 10a #3010, 2 blks. n. of Av. Ocampo and 2 blks. e. of Av. 20 de Noviembre. The mansion was the home of Pancho Villa, a revolutionary leader who sympathized with the hardships endured by the Mexican peasant majority. It also is referred to as Quinta

Luz in honor of Villa's wife Dona Luz, who lived here until her death in the early 1980s.

The mansion's front portion is arranged around an open courtyard in which stands the bullet-riddled Dodge Villa was riding in when he was ambushed and killed. Two floors of exhibit rooms are dedicated to the Mexican Revolution of 1910 and include displays of military uniforms, period firearms (revolvers and some machine guns), and a collection of photographs of Villa and his cohorts.

Exhibit information is in Spanish and English. **Time:** Allow 1 hour minimum. **Phone:** (614) 416-2958.

#### CIUDAD JUÁREZ, CHIHUAHUA

**Note:** For current information about safety/security issues in Ciudad Juárez, refer to the U.S. State Department website (travel.state.gov).

The history of this sprawling border city dates back to 1668, when Franciscan friar Father Garcia de San Francisco founded the Mission of Our Lady of Guadalupe (Misión de Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe). The cathedral still stands on the west side of Plaza de Armas in downtown Ciudad Juárez.

#### **Border Tips**

There are several border crossings between El Paso and downtown Juárez, including the Ysleta-Zaragoza Bridge, the Bridge of the Americas, the Stanton Street Bridge and the Santa Fe Street Bridge (also called the Paseo del Norte Bridge).

The port of entry at Santa Teresa in nearby New Mexico is on the western edge of the El Paso/Juárez metropolitan area; take exit 8 (Artcraft Road) off I-10 and proceed west about 13 miles. Since it bypasses the city, this is the recommended crossing point for tourists and other travelers who are driving to Chihuahua and beyond or otherwise headed for interior Mexico. Banjercito offices at this border crossing and at the 30-kilometer (19-mile) mark on Mex. 45 (the Juárez-Chihuahua Highway) can process the paperwork necessary for vehicle travel into the interior.

Dollars or pesos are accepted when entering or departing Mexico or the United States. Baggage may be inspected at the customs offices. Both Mexican and U.S. Customs and Border Protection offices are open daily 24 hours at Ciudad Juárez. U.S. Customs and Border Protection offices at Santa Teresa are open daily 6 a.m.-midnight. AAA/CAA members can obtain Mexican automobile insurance at AAA Texas offices.

Destination El Paso: 400 W. San Antonio Ave., El Paso, TX 79901. **Phone:** (915) 534-0600, or (800) 351-6024 outside of Texas.

#### COPPER CANYON, CHIHUAHUA

Note: For current information about safety/security issues in Copper Canyon, refer to the U.S. State Department website (travel.state.gov).

The Copper Canyon (Barranca del Cobre) area of northwestern Mexico was created by more than 60 million years of geological upheaval. Over time the ash deposited by volcanic eruptions built up to form massive plateaus; further volcanic activity created gaping cracks that were subsequently eroded by rain and subterranean water to carve twisting canyons. Within this extensive canyon system are rivers that are rendered all but unnavigable due to boulder fields and lofty waterfalls.

The name "Copper Canyon" is something of a misnomer; although one canyon along a section of the Urique River is named Barranca del Cobre, the Copper Canyon as a whole actually comprises more than 20 canyons covering some 25,000 square miles. There are six main canyon systems: the Urique, Copper, Cusarare and Tararecua canyons; Batopilas Canyon; Candamena Canyon; Huapoca Canyon; the Oteros, Chínipas and Septentrion canyons; and Sinforosa Canyon. Mountain elevations within the entire region range from 7,500 to 9,500 feet, with a few peaks reaching 12,000 feet.

This rugged and forbidding region has long been inhabited by the Rarámuri Indians. Also known as the Tarahumara, these mountain dwellers have managed to preserve their ancient way of life more successfully than other Native American groups. Although sharing a common ancestry with the warrior-like Aztecs, the peaceful Tarahumara could not have been more different. Settling the plains of central Chihuahua, they grew corn, beans and squash, constructing irrigation canals to make the arid land productive. The Tarahumara took advantage of more than 250 varieties of edible and medicinal plants, and also were renowned for their stamina, chasing down game through sheer dogged determination until the animals collapsed from exhaustion.

During the 17th century Spanish settlers enslaved many Tarahumara, forcing them to toil in mines and carry goods across terrain that was too rough for even horses to negotiate. To escape servitude many of them retreated deep into the remote Copper Canyon sierra country. Their descendants continue to live here today, working small ranches or farms and living in simple huts. Some of the more reclusive Tarahumara still dwell in remote mountain

caves in the summer, migrating to the warmer *barrancas* (canyon bottoms) in winter.

It was not until the beginning of the 20th century that this vast and inhospitable region was penetrated by a railroad. Construction of the Chihuahua-Pacific Railway (Chihuahua al Pacífico) began in 1898 but was not completed until 1961. A noteworthy engineering feat, the 941kilometer (588-mile) rail line begins at Ojinaga, just across the border from Presidio, Tex., and ends at the Pacific coast port of Topolobampo. It boasts 99 tunnels and 39 bridges. Within a distance of less than 125 miles, numerous switchbacks drop from an elevation of more than 7,000 feet in the mountains to near sea level on the coastal plain.

One of the railway's most dramatic stretches is the approach to the station at Témoris, where three different levels of track hug one mountainside. Another breathtaking view unfolds at the small mountain village of Divisadero, at an elevation of about 7,400 feet. Here the Urique, Copper and Tararecua canyons are all visible, a vast overlapping series of rust-colored walls and pine-clad ridges.

In 2010 a Swiss-built aerial tram opened at Divisadero. The tram's 60-passenger gondolas travel between the village and a tram station located in the canyon some 1,150 feet below. The ride takes about 20 minutes, with a stop at the midway point for picture taking. The tram departs daily 9-4:30. The cost is 250 pesos; 125 pesos (ages 0-10). At the lower tram station is Barrancas del Cobre Adventure Park (see attraction listing under Creel).

One fascinating aspect of the Copper Canyon is the dramatic difference between environments. On canyon rims and atop high plateaus—where the altitude exceeds 8,000 feet—winters are cold and summers mild, with abundant rain. Fragrant forests of pine and Douglas fir cloak these highlands, the mesa tops are bright with wildflowers from the end of September into October, and alders and poplars add fall foliage color.

In contrast, canyon bottoms, often a mile below the rim, are subtropical. Palms and towering fig and ceiba trees—the ceiba is known for its buttressed roots and huge, spreading canopy of leaves—grow where water is available. Wildlife ranges from badgers, otters, skunks and the seldom-seen ocelot to such endangered bird species as the military macaw and the thick-billed parrot.

The town of Creel is a major stop on the rail line and functions as a base for excursions to other towns and villages. Hotels in Creel can arrange guided day or overnight trips to towns on the canyon floor. Lodgings can lack electricity and telephones; the key word is rustic.

The mode of transportation is often a school bus, and the ride can be dusty and bone-jarring. Sturdy walking shoes are absolutely essential for exploring; even guided

hikes may involve anything from fording a brook to clambering over fallen logs. If you hire a guide make certain that he is familiar with your destination; much of this region remains authentic wilderness.

From the train station at Bahuichivo, a trip can be arranged to the mountain village of Cerocahui, where a Jesuit mission was established in the late 17th century. Local hotels can arrange round-trip excursions from Bahuichivo to the canyon-bottom village of Urique. Cusárare, about 19 kilometers (12 miles) from Creel, also has a Jesuit mission that was built in order to minister to the Tarahumara. Lake Arareco (see Creel) is located in an area of volcanic rock formations that resemble mushrooms.

A trip to the town of Batopilas, about 129 kilometers (80 miles) southwest of Creel, is an 8-hour adventure if taken by local bus. The narrow, dusty dirt road to the canyon bottom passes Cerro El Pastel (Cake Mountain), named for its alternating layers of pink and white volcanic rock. The Urique and Basíhuare rivers trace tight, meandering paths before their headwaters lose themselves in unnamed chasms. As the route descends temperatures rise, and forest of pine are replaced by stands of cactus.

Batopilas itself is a former silver-mining town. It began to boom in the 1740s, although mining operations had been in existence for more than 100 years before that. According to local legend, the town's cobblestone streets were once paved with silver. Distinctly different from the canyon-top villages, Batopilas has whitewashed houses, palm trees and gardens of subtropical flowers—temperatures here are some 30 degrees warmer than at the top of the canyon. Local ranchers ride into town on horseback, and an occasional goat or pig wanders the streets. Accommodations for overnight stays are modest.

#### **Practicalities**

Allow plenty of time to take this rail journey. First-class trains depart from both Chihuahua and Los Mochis in the early morning (around 6 a.m.) and take anywhere from 14 to 17 hours (depending on whether there are weather-related delays) to cover the 654-kilometer (406-mile) distance between the two cities. Because of the length of the journey it's necessary to spend at least one night en route to better experience what the region has to offer. Creel has the most lodging options, but hotels in the vicinity of the train stations also can be quite expensive. More rustic cabin accommodations are a short taxi ride from the stations, but amenities are likely to be quite basic.

During the winter months, leaving from Los Mochis or El Fuerte guarantees seeing the most spectacular scenery in full daylight; coming from Chihuahua, towering canyon walls can block the last rays of the sun and magnify the gathering gloom of evening. Summer's extended daylight

hours, however, make this decision less crucial. Also keep in mind that you will not really experience the true magnificence of the Copper Canyon from either a train car or a station platform; take a bus or horseback tour to one of the various canyon rim viewing points in order to fully appreciate the views.

Temperatures can be quite cold December through February at the higher elevations, and the canyon bottoms are uncomfortably hot in May and June. The best times of the year to take this trip are March and April or late September through October, when both the sierra wildflowers and fall foliage are at their colorful peak. There may be fewer travelers from August into September, and the land-scape will be green from summer rains. Avoid May and June, the driest time of the year; browned-out vegetation and hazy skies are not the best showcase for the Copper Canyon's natural beauty.

The easiest way to arrange a tour of the Copper Canyon is through a travel agency or rail tour company that offers an all-inclusive trip package. These packages normally include applicable ground transportation (but not airfare to and from the point of departure), lodgings, meals and sightseeing excursions. Mexico-based Camp David provides organized train tours on the Chihuahua-Pacific rail line that depart from Los Mochis and also feature sightseeing in Cerocahui, Creel and at the Gulf of California coast; phone (866) 247-3464 (from the United States or Canada).

Fully escorted, all-inclusive tours also are offered by Los Angeles-based California Native International Adventures. Their standard Copper Canyon itinerary departs from Los Mochis and includes stays at Divisadero and Creel plus sightseeing trips to a Tarahumara cave dwelling and the village of Cusárare. Tours wrap in Chihuahua. For further information phone (310) 642-1140 or (800) 926-1140 (from the United States).

**Note:** Tour companies outside of Mexico do not sell individual train tickets, only tickets that are part of a tour package that includes lodgings and transportation. They cannot provide information regarding point-to-point travel along the Chihuahua-Pacific Railway route.

#### **CREEL, CHIHUAHUA**

**Note:** For current information about safety/security issues in Creel, refer to the U.S. State Department website (travel.state.gov).

The logging village of Creel (creh-EHL) was once the western terminus of the Chihuahua al Pacífico Railway; it is now the approximate midway point. Although the quantity

of pine shipped from the vicinity has diminished over the decades, active lumber camps still operate. The concrete statue of Christ gazing down from the cliffs north of town bears testimony to the Jesuit priests who first came to this area in the early 17th century.

Creel retains a raw charm; men ride down López Mateos, the main street, on horseback, and Tarahumara women in native dress sell pottery and baskets from the curbside. Shops also sell Tarahumara arts and crafts like rugs, wood carvings, necklaces, dolls and violins. Indians benefit from all sales at the Tarahumara Mission Store.

Creel functions as a base for trips to other parts of the region; dirt-gravel roads lead to Tarahumara villages at the edges of scenic canyons. Note: If you plan to drive to this area in your own vehicle, fill the gas tank in Chihuahua or the town of La Junta, on Mex. 16. Drive time from Chihuahua to Creel is about 3.5 hours; a sturdy vehicle is recommended.

Basaseáchic Falls National Park is about 5 hours away via a paved road running from Creel north to the Mex. 16 junction, then west on Mex. 16 to the park. The falls plunge some 800 feet into an open cylinder formed by huge rock columns. The spray nourishes pine trees growing at the base of the falls, and a marked footpath allows hikers access to the bottom of the canyon. At the top there are basic camping facilities.

BARRANCAS DEL COBRE ADVENTURE PARK (Parque de Aventuras Barrancas del Cobre) is in Divisadero, 2 km (1.2 mi.) s. of the Barrancas train station. A Swiss-built aerial tram (teleférico) in Divisadero consists of 60-passenger gondolas that travel between the village and the canyon some 1,150 feet below. The tram trip takes about 20 minutes. The park is at the lower tram station. For thrill seekers and adventure junkies the unquestionable highlight is the seven ziplines (tirolesas), one of them almost a mile in length. It's an amazing way to see the Copper Canyon by literally flying through it.

There are many other activities available, including rock climbing, rappelling, mini-golf, bungee jumping for kids and an events amphitheater. The fact that the park is built on the edge of the canyon means that all of these activities also come with incredible views. Time: Allow 2 hours minimum. **Phone:** (635) 589-6805.

#### **DURANGO, DURANGO**

Note: For current information about safety/security issues in Durango, refer to the U.S. State Department website (travel.state.gov).

Not many travelers make it to Durango (doo-RAHNgoh), situated in the high desert country of north-central Mexico. Comparative isolation is one of the main reasons: Mazatlán, the nearest city of any size, is nearly 200 miles away, and the Sierra Madre Occidental mountains form an inhospitable barrier to the west. So despite being an important commercial crossroads due to the fact that it sits at the junction of two major highways (Mex. 40 and Mex. 45), Durango's location makes it a bit of a diamond in the rough for visitors.

Local legend maintains that it was in a cave in one of the buttes punctuating the countryside north of Durango that revolutionary Pancho Villa traded his soul to the Devil in return for mastery over other men. Villa was born Doroteo Arango in 1877 on a hacienda near the village of San Juan del Río, 110 kilometers (68 miles) north of Durango on Mex. 45. He grew up an uneducated peasant, working as a sharecropper. After killing a man who had seduced and then abandoned his younger sister, Villa began a life on the run from the law.

After becoming involved in the fight to overthrow the iron rule of dictator Porfirio Díaz Villa went on to become one of the Mexican Revolution's foremost figures, envisioning himself as a Mexican Robin Hood who took from the rich hacienda owners and gave back to poor farmers and sharecroppers. Commanding a fiercely loyal band of supporters collectively known as the Division of the North (División del Norte), Villa was an able military leader as well as a flamboyant personality who today is one of Mexico's most admired folk heroes.

#### **City Layout**

Durango—officially Victoria de Durango—sits in a valley strewn with craggy buttes that have an unusual orange color. It's a beautiful natural setting that initially seems compromised by modern industry; like other Mexican cities founded during the colonial era, the outskirts of town look grimy and industrial. To experience the best of what the city has to offer head straight for the historic downtown core, where the 17th- and 18th-century colonial architecture has for the most part been handsomely preserved.

Plaza de Armas, the main plaza, is between avenidas 20 de Noviembre and 5 de Febrero and calles Constitución and Juárez. It has pretty gardens and a circular bandstand, and is the scene of Sunday band concerts. The major visitor points of interest are all within several blocks of the plaza, making Durango easy to explore on foot.

A block southwest of Plaza de Armas, facing the north side of Plaza Centenario, is the Government Palace (Palacio de Gobierno), an 18th-century baroque building

distinguished by its arcades. Inside are murals illustrating Durango state history.

A block north of the Government Palace on Avenida 20 de Noviembre, between calles Zaragoza and Bruno Martinez, is the Ricardo Castro Theater (Teatro Ricardo Castro), originally called the Teatro Principal but renamed for a Durangueño pianist and composer when it was renovated in 1990. Used for performances by visiting music, theater and dance troupes, it has beautiful marble and tile flooring.

Shoppers can browse through the Municipal Market (Mercado Gómez Palacio), 3 blocks east of Plaza de Armas (entrances on Calle Pasteur and Calle Patoni). In addition to the standard displays of produce and foodstuffs the market has stalls selling *charro* (Mexican-style rodeo) clothing, leather goods, wool sarapes, locally made handicrafts and souvenirs with scorpion motifs; the stinging arachnids are a common sight in this desert country.

The surrounding countryside has long been used by filmmakers for location shooting, particularly Hollywood westerns (see Movie Sets attraction listing). Golden age icons Lillian Gish, John Wayne and Clark Gable as well as more recent stars like Jack Nicholson, John Belushi and John Travolta have all starred in movies filmed on location.

A downtown restaurant popular with Durangueños is Los Farolitos, on Calle Bruno Martinez near the intersection with Avenida 20 de Noviembre. Huge, freshly made flour tortillas are wrapped around a variety of tasty fillings, from carne asada (grilled steak) to cheese spiked with bits of green chiles (queso con rajas). A branch of the Mexican chain Sanborn's on Avenida 20 de Noviembre offers a reliably standard menu and good coffee.

The central bus station is east of downtown near the junction of avenidas Felipe Pescador and Colegio Militar (Mex. 40). Transportes del Norte offers first-class bus service from Chihuahua, Mazatlán, Mexico City, Zacatecas and other Mexican cities. The Ruta 2 line runs west from the station along Avenida 20 de Noviembre (downtown's main east-west thoroughfare) to Plaza de Armas. It makes stops within easy walking distance of downtown points of interest. The fare is inexpensive (about 50c U.S.).

Durango State Tourism Office (Dirección General de Turismo y Cinematografía): downtown at Calle Florida #1106, on the second floor of the Barrio del Calvario. Open Mon.-Fri. 9-8, Sat.-Sun. 10-6. **Phone:** (618) 811-1107.

MOVIE SETS (Escenarios) in the city vicinity are permanent fixtures. Durango's heyday as a moviemaking center began in the 1950s and continued through the '70s, as actors like John Wayne, Burt Lancaster and Robert Ryan came here to film Hollywood westerns. Among the classics shot in the vicinity were Raoul Walsh's "The Tall Men" and Sam Peckinpah's "The Wild Bunch" and "Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid." For information contact the Durango State Tourism Office.

**Note:** These locations are remote and difficult to reach via dirt roads; they should only be visited on a guided excursion arranged through the Durango State Tourism Office. **Phone:** (618) 811-1107.

**Chupaderos** is about 14 km (9 mi.) n. of Durango off Mex. 45. An actual Mexican village, it has been used for filming more than any other area location. The town's original structures have been augmented over the years by Old West-style buildings fabricated for the movies, which ironically are occupied by local families. Among the Westerns filmed here was the 1970 oater "Chisum," starring John Wayne.

A few kilometers to the south on Mex. 45 is Villa del Oeste, a village that first came into being as a constructed "Western" town. It's now a tourist attraction offering shops, restaurants and re-enactments of Old West-style shootouts and barroom brawls on weekends.

#### **Nearby Destinations**

Opened in the 1940s, the 312-kilometer (195-mile) journey from Durango west to Mazatlán via two-lane Mex. 40 passes through some of Mexico's most spectacular scenery, courtesy of the Sierra Madre Occidental mountain range. Locals—quite appropriately—call it the Road of 3,000 Curves (Camino de Tres Mil Curvas).

From Durango, the road ascends through stands of pine to the logging town of El Salto, about 100 kilometers (62 miles) west. The surrounding region is noted for waterfalls, thick forests and interesting geological formations at elevations of up to 8,500 feet. Continuing west, La Ciudad is another mountain town with a couple of bare-bones diners (comedores) with wood-burning stoves and cement floors.

The most unnerving part of the route begins a short distance west of La Ciudad. The Devil's Backbone (El Espinazo del Diablo) is a narrow mountain ridge with precipitous drop-offs falling away from both sides of the road. The Pacific Ocean, more than 90 kilometers (55 miles) to the southwest, can be seen on clear days from this height.

Countless switchbacks, twisting hairpin turns and little to no shoulders-not to mention numerous encounters with trucks, buses, burros, cows and bicycles—made driving the Devil's Backbone an extreme adventure. Sections were frequently closed due to accidents or mudslides, and thick clouds can reduce visibility to near zero.

A triumph of man's ingenuity over a challenging environment, it was a spectacular trek for motorists with nerves of steel and plenty of experience negotiating mountain roads. It was also not without danger, as drug cartels have firm control in this remote region, setting up their own roadblocks and engaging in highway robbery while many locals eke out a living cultivating marijuana and opium.

Fortunately, the road trip between the two cities became safer—and somewhat easier—in late 2013, when Mex. 40-D, the Durango-Mazatlán toll road, finally opened to motorists. The new toll sections branch off of and intersect with portions of the free road; they are clearly marked, much less serpentine and are equipped with ample shoulders. The route includes an astounding number of bridges, eight of them with a clearance of over 900 feet, and 63 tunnels that total nearly 11 miles; the longest is the 1.7-mile Sinaloense Tunnel.

The spectacular highlight of this massive engineering project is the four-lane Baluarte Bridge (Puente Baluarte). Straddling the Durango/Sinaloa state border, it is the world's second-tallest highway bridge, spanning the Baluarte River at a dizzying height of 1,322 feet. When crossing this bridge, keep in mind that there is no separate viewing area (and the views are jaw-dropping). As a result some motorists will stop in the right lane to get out and take photographs.

There are four toll plazas, and the total fee from Mazatlán to Durango is around 500 pesos. But while toll charges are hefty, the drive time is also reduced considerably, from almost 8 hours on the old road exclusively to approximately 3 hours taking advantage of the new highway sections. For the time being gas stations and other road services are few and far between, so make sure your tank is full before setting out on this journey from either Durango or Mazatlán.

#### **HERMOSILLO, SONORA**

Note: For current information about safety/security issues in Hermosillo, refer to the U.S. State Department website (travel.state.gov).

Capital of the state of Sonora, Hermosillo (ehr-moh-SEE-yo) rises abruptly from the sparsely settled terrain of northwestern Mexico. Big and spread out, the city is not conducive to sightseeing but is a convenient stop for motorists on the way south to Mazatlán and other Pacific coast resorts.

General Ignacio Pesqueira García International Airport is on the city's western side off Avenida Jesús García Morales (Mex. 26/Carretera Hermosillo-Bahía Kino). Aeroméxico and American Airlines offer direct flights from the

United States. Other airlines providing service to the airport include Delta and Volaris. For additional information about airlines see Arriving by Air, page p. 28.

The main bus station (Terminal de Autobuses de Hermosillo) is east of downtown on Boulevard Luis Encinas Johnson (between Calle Los Pinos and Calle Jaffa). Firstclass bus service from Nogales is offered by the TAP and Tufesa lines. For additional information about buses see Bus Service, page p. 36.

Aside from the colonial-era architecture of the 18thcentury Cathedral of the Assumption (Catedral de la Asunción), the Government Palace (Palacio Gobierno) and the pink-hued City Hall (Palacio Municipal), most of Hermosillo looks blandly modern. Plaza Zaragoza, the central plaza, provides welcome shade trees and an oasis from the crowded and frequently dusty downtown streets. Also check out the colorful murals depicting Sonoran history in the Government Palace courtyard.

Mex. 15/15-D, also called the Pacific Coast Highway, extends from the U.S. border at Nogales south and then east to Mexico City. It is mostly a divided four-lane highway except when passing through some small towns and villages. Watch for occasional potholes and rocks, especially in the vicinity of hills or low mountains. Highway repair work is frequent, and traffic may be diverted to the two-lane stretch that is open.

It costs around 760 pesos in tolls to drive an automobile on Mex. 15-D from Nogales south to Mazatlán. Dollars are usually accepted at toll booths near the U.S. border, but it's best to have pesos on hand for the entire route. Note: Toll charges can go up without warning, and rates for different types of vehicles aren't always posted. Avoid the toll road SIN-1 (Sinaloa Express Highway 1) between Guamúchil and Culiacán, which is targeted by robbers.

Saltwater fishing is the main attraction at the Gulf of California resort town of Kino Bay (Bahía Kino), some 105 kilometers (65 miles) southwest of Hermosillo via Mex. 16. Named for Jesuit missionary Francisco Eusebio Kino, this was long a hideaway known only to a few intrepid RV owners. There are condominiums and secluded vacation homes here, although the mountain-backed beaches of tan-colored sand are mostly undeveloped.

Tourist facilities are concentrated in Kino Nuevo (New Kino), separated by some 4 kilometers (2.5 miles) of open beach from Kino Viejo, the Mexican village. The beaches are practically deserted during the summer months, but they also are uncomfortably hot.

Sonora State Tourism Office (Subsecretaría de Fomento al Turismo): on the third floor of the State Government Building, North Wing, located on Calle Comonfort between Blvd. Francisco Serna and Paseo Río Sonora Norte (about 7 blocks south of Plaza Zaragoza and 3 blocks west of Mex. 15). **Phone:** (662) 289-5800.

To receive visitor information from the Sonora Department of Tourism, phone (800) 476-6672 (from the United States) or 01 (800) 716-2555 (toll-free long distance within Mexico).

#### LOS MOCHIS. SINALOA

Travel Advisory: We do not recommend travel to the state of Sinaloa due to the U.S. Department of State's "Do Not Travel" warning. The acute level of crime and violence in this area prohibits AAA inspections.

Los Mochis (los MO-chees) is the major coastal terminus of the Chihuahua al Pacífico Railway, which travels across the rugged Sierra Madre Occidental to Chihuahua via the Barranca del Cobre (Copper Canyon) region. Technically the end of the rail line is 24 kilometers (15 miles) south at Topolobampo. This deep sea port is connected by ferry to La Paz, B.C.S.

Baja Ferries service links Topolobampo with La Paz; the trip takes about 6 hours. Schedules and rates are subject to change and should be double-checked in advance with the Topolobampo ferry office; phone (668) 862-1003 or 01 (800) 337-7437 (toll-free long distance within Mexico).

#### **NOGALES, SONORA**

**Note:** For current information about safety/security issues in Nogales, refer to the U.S. State Department website (travel.state.gov).

The border city of Nogales (noh-GAH-lehs) is sometimes referred to as Ambos Nogales ("both Nogales") in recognition of the sister city of Nogales, Ariz. on the other side of the international boundary fence. Established in 1882, the city is not only significantly larger than its U.S. counterpart but also retains a strong sense of Mexican identity.

The gateway into northwestern mainland Mexico and points south is primarily a day visit for tourists. A tourist permit is not needed for in-town stays of less than 72 hours, but proof of citizenship is required.

Mexican and U.S. Customs and Border Protection offices are open 24 hours daily. For southbound motorists, the official immigration checkpoint is 21 kilometers (13 miles) south of Nogales on Mex. 15. You can obtain a tourist permit here if you don't already have one, and must present a federal temporary vehicle importation permit or an "Only Sonora" temporary vehicle importation permit (if you intend to stay within the state of Sonora) and accompanying windshield sticker.

A vehicle permit is not required for travel to the following destinations in the state of Sonora: Rocky Point (Puerto Peñasco), Guaymas, San Carlos, Bahía Kino and other locations west of Mex. 15, as well as cities along Mex. 15 (Magdalena, Santa Ana, Hermosillo). An "Only Sonora" permit is required if driving within Sonora east of Mex. 15 as well as south of Empalme (about 350 miles south of the U.S. border). The permit can be obtained at Banjercito offices in Agua Prieta (opposite Douglas, Ariz.), Cananea (southwest of Agua Prieta on Mex. 2) and Empalme (on Mex. 15 at Km marker 98, just south of the Guaymas bypass).

From Tucson, I-19 south ends at Nogales, Ariz.; signs point the way to the border crossing. Mex. 15 begins at the border, but the downtown Nogales crossing passes through the most congested part of the city. Motorists intending to bypass Nogales for points south can save time by using the international truck crossing, known as the Mariposa crossing; take exit 4 off I-19, then proceed west on SR 189 (Mariposa Road), following signs that say "Border Truck Route" and "International Border." This route reconnects with Mex. 15 south of Nogales at the 21-kilometer (13-mile) immigration checkpoint. The charge at the toll booth approximately 6 miles south of the border is about \$2 (U.S.).

If you're driving through downtown Nogales back to the United States, watch for the sign that says "Linea International"; follow the directions for the road that leads to the border crossing.

Since almost all of the tourist-oriented shopping is within easy walking distance of the border, it is recommended that day visitors park on the Arizona side and head into Mexico on foot. From the Nogales-Santa Cruz County Chamber of Commerce and Visitor Center, 123 W. Kino Park Way (just off the intersection of Grand Avenue and US 82) in Nogales, Ariz., it's about a 1.5-mile drive south to a series of guarded lots; all-day parking fees average about \$8, and cash is expected. The turnstiles to Mexico are at the foot of the Port of Entry.

Shops and vendor stalls catering to tourists are concentrated along north-south Avenida Obregón. They sell pottery, baskets, fabrics, ceramics, leather goods, glassware, carved pine furniture, rugs, jewelry and more. Most business is conducted in English, bargaining is acceptable and even expected, and American currency is preferred. More exclusive establishments have fixed prices and carry crafts and gift items from all over Mexico. When buying at stalls or from street vendors, always check for quality.

Along with shopping, Nogales offers such standard tourist experiences as having your picture taken astride a donkey and listening to mariachi bands. And like other Mexican border cities, it's a place to get prescriptions filled at a cost that is often far less than stateside.

#### **PUERTO PEÑASCO. SONORA**

Note: U.S. citizens driving to Puerto Peñasco should use the Lukeville, Ariz./Sonoyta, Sonora border crossing and travel only during daylight hours.

Puerto Peñasco (PWEHR-toh peh-NYAHS-coh) is situated in the midst of some of Mexico's most inhospitable territory: blazingly hot, extremely arid and impressively desolate. It's nevertheless a popular destination for campers and RVers because of its close proximity to the U.S. border—about a 4-hour drive from Tucson and 4 to 5 hours from Phoenix.

The beaches in this area are generally wide and flat, with both sandy and rocky areas. While the coarse, tancolored grains are no match for the powdery white sand at Cancún, the blue-green water is calm and shallow, waves are gentle and there are no riptides—ideal conditions for wading and swimming. Beachcombers take note: The northern Gulf of California coast experiences an extreme tidal range of more than 20 feet, which exposes a treasure trove of shells and marine life at low tide.

Playa Hermosa, just west of town, has restrooms, showers and snack stands. To the east at Playa Las Conchas are tide pools full of crabs, mussels, sponges and other creatures. Farther east are Morua and La Pinta estuaries, which provide habitats for shore and wading birds. In between them are three beaches—Playa Encanto, Playa Dorada and Playa Miramar—lined with condos, resort complexes and rental homes.

Leisure activities include shore fishing, chartered sportfishing excursions, sailing, snorkeling, scuba diving, kayaking and, during the winter months, whale watching. Or you could just kick back and enjoy the sunset.

The Old Port section of town is perched at the tip of a rocky cape overlooking the gulf. Browse the craft shops along waterfront Malecón Kino, where vendors sell—in addition to the ubiquitous T-shirts, ceramics and seashell necklaces—carvings fashioned from ironwood, a desert tree known for its extremely hard and dense wood. Then wander through the fish market, stacked with displays of freshly caught fish and teeming with vendors selling shrimp for "the best prices."

Taquerias set up along the malecón and around the harbor area. They're an inexpensive and tasty on-the-spot snack, and also should be safe to eat as long as you avoid adding the lettuce, tomatoes or carrots that are often provided (and may not be rinsed with purified water). Choose a stand popular with Rocoportenses (locals).

#### **Practicalities**

Sonoyta, the small town just across the border from Lukeville, Ariz., has the usual assortment of tourist-oriented shops but lacks the excitement of bigger and more bustling border cities like Nogales, Mexicali and Tijuana. Unless you're intent on scoring a souvenir, stay on Boulevard de las Américas, following the signs for Puerto Peñasco.

A temporary vehicle importation permit is not needed if traveling to Puerto Peñasco from the United States. Motorists must, however, carry Mexican automobile insurance. If you plan on bringing a boat, ATV or other type of recreational vehicle, bring copies of the ownership documents.

Mex. 8, the direct route to the Gulf of California, is a two-lane road that has a couple of sharp turns. The approximately 105-kilometer (65-mile) drive through open range country takes over an hour; note the lower speed limit of 65-75 kilometers per hour (about 45 mph). Because of the lack of roadside facilities, the trip from the border should be made only during the daytime.

The summer heat in Puerto Peñasco can be extreme; the best time to visit is from November through May, when the weather is cooler. The months with the most visitors are March and April.

Many local businesses, however, accept or even prefer U.S. dollars. In case of emergency, dial 911. For medical emergencies, contact the Red Cross (Cruz Roja); phone (638) 383-2266. To reach the local police department, phone (638) 383-2626.

Rocky Point Convention & Visitors Bureau: Boulevard Freemont #4, in Plaza Freemont. Phone: (638) 388-0444. or (602) 539-0027 (from the United States).

#### SAN CARLOS, SONORA

Note: For current information about safety/security issues in San Carlos, refer to the U.S. State Department website (travel.state.gov).

San Carlos, "just over the mountain" from the port city of Guaymas, is actually about 8 kilometers (5 miles) north via Mex. 15, then 24 kilometers (15 miles) west on fourlane Mex. 124. Guaymenas Indians occupied this area for a few thousand years before the Spanish arrival in the mid-16th century; Jesuit priests built a mission in 1710. San Carlos flourished as a major supply center during the Mexican-American and U.S. Civil wars, but following the

Mexican Revolution of 1910 sport fishing took precedence over port activities.

Quiet San Carlos "went Hollywood" in the late 1960s when the movie "Catch 22" was filmed at nearby Playa Algodones. A Club Med followed, and today's resort was born. Natural beauty remains in the form of tranquil white-sand beaches and the clear, blue-green waters of the Sea of Cortez, inhabited by more than 650 species of game fish. You'll find upscale condos and Sonora's most luxurious accommodations in San Carlos, but there also are inexpensive motels and RV parks that cater to budget travelers.

Marina San Carlos, one of Mexico's largest yacht marinas, has extensive docking facilities as well as moorings on outer San Carlos Bay. The San Carlos Country Club, Avenida Cristobal #1390, has an 18-hole golf course; most hotels in the area can arrange a temporary membership. Gary's Dive Shop, on Boulevard Fabio Beltrones (at Km marker 10), offers a variety of fishing and scuba excursions; phone (622) 226-0049.

**Sonora State Tourism Office:** A branch office is located on Blvd. Fabio Beltrones (Mex. 124). **Phone:** (622) 226-0202.







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## **Northeastern Mexico**

ortheastern Mexico is not the Mexican vacation paradise touted in glossy travel brochures. Whereas resorts like Cancún and Cabo San Lucas lure vacationers from all over the world, the beaches along the low-lying, marshy Gulf of Mexico coastline in the state of Tamaulipas are muddy and mosquito-ridden. Sprawling Coahuila is arid and sparsely populated, with tourist facilities few and far between.

Saltillo, in a broad valley surrounded by the imposing peaks of the Sierra Madre Oriental, was founded as a Spanish outpost in 1577. By the early 17th century the

settlement was a strategic center for Spanish expeditions embarking on explorations to the north, and from 1835 to 1847 Saltillo was capital of a territory that included Texas and extended as far northward as present-day Colorado.

Capital of the state of Nuevo León, industrial Monterrey is Mexico's third largest city. Sheer size makes it a daunting choice for the casual tourist. But the plazas and narrow thoroughfares of Monterrey's old center retain some of the flavor of Spanish colonial days, and a handful of pedestrian-only streets provide relief from big-city congestion.

AAA recommends that travelers consult online U.S. State Department travel advisories when planning traveling abroad. Find this information at travel.state.gov/content/passports/en/country/mexico.html.

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#### **MONTERREY, NUEVO LEÓN**

Founded in 1596 by Don Diego de Montemayor, Monterrey (mohn-teh-REY) was named for the Viceroy of New Spain, Don Gaspar de Zúñiga y Acevedo, Count of Monterrey. Real development of the destination began in the 18th century, when El Obispado, or the Bishop's Palace (see attraction listing)—initially built as a place of retirement for Catholic bishops—became the seat of the religious diocese.

The city lies in a valley ringed with craggy mountains, including 5,700-foot Hill of the Saddle (Cerro de la Silla) and 7,800-foot Hill of the Miter (Cerro de la Mitra). The former is saddle-shaped; the latter resembles a bishop's headdress. The mountains trap smog created by the dense concentration of industry, creating a significant pollution problem, and with an estimated metropolitan area population of nearly 3.5 million, there is formidable congestion. Contrasting with these urban pains are a couple of impressive natural attractions and other things to do in the area around the city.

#### **Practicalities**

Mariano Escobedo International Airport is about 30 kilometers (18 miles) northeast of downtown. Aeroméxico, American Airlines, Delta, United and Volaris offer direct international flights from the United States. For additional information about airlines see Arriving by Air, page p. 28.

Motorists access the destination via two major toll highways—Mex. 85-D from Laredo/Nuevo Laredo or Mex. 40-D from McAllen/Reynosa. These highways more or less parallel free Mex. 85 (the Pan-American Highway) and Mex. 40. Although there aren't as many things to see, Mex. 40-D is convenient to downtown Monterrey.

Metro, the subway system (also referred to as Metrorrey), consists of two lines. Elevated Line 1 runs eastwest along Avenida Colón, north of the downtown core, and then toward the northwestern suburbs. Underground

Line 2 originates at Gran Plaza (the Zaragoza station) and runs west to Avenida Cuauhtémoc, then north-south to the vicinity of the Cuauhtémoc Brewery (the General Anaya station).

Metro is used primarily by office workers and is not particularly helpful for the visitor interested in fun things to do, although Line 2 does provide access to the Zona Rosa, downtown's upscale shopping area with local restaurants. Magnetic one-way ticket cards can be purchased from vending machines at the entrance stations for 4.5 pesos; multiple-trip cards also are available. Trains run daily from 5 a.m.-midnight. Check with the State Tourism Office for further information.

The downtown streets, wedged within a ring of expressways, tend to be narrow, one way and congested. Street parking in this area is difficult, and overnight parking is prohibited. The best way to see the sights is by taxi or travel tour. Taxis are plentiful and can be hailed on the street; always determine low fare in advance. First-class bus service to Monterrey from Dallas, Houston and San Antonio is offered by Transportes del Norte. Greyhound Bus Lines in Laredo, Texas, can provide information about bus lines serving northeastern Mexico; phone (956) 723-4324.

#### **City Layout**

At first glance Monterrey is all factories, housing and noisy traffic congestion. The city center, where hotels and office buildings stand next to old flat-roofed residences, is a haven of sorts from this industrial sprawl. One of the most interesting things to see symbolizes Mexico's break from Spain—the figure of "Patria" (Fatherland) holding a broken chain, which sits atop the Independence Arch (Arco de la Independencia) at Avenida Pino Suárez and Calzada Francisco Madero.

La Purísima Church, at Calle Serafín Peña and Avenida Hidalgo (west of Gran Plaza on the way to the Bishop's



Palace), is considered a fun place to go for an outstanding example of modern ecclesiastical architecture. Pastora Park (Parque la Pastora), east of downtown off Avenida Chapultepec, is a naturally landscaped recreation area featuring a lake and a zoo that offers things to do with kids.

# Shopping

Folk arts and handicrafts such as leather articles, blown glass and pottery are available at two downtown markets in Monterrey. Mercado Juárez is off Avenida Benito Juárez between avenidas Martinez and Aramberri: the more tourist-oriented Mercado Colón is on Avenida Constitución west of Gran Plaza. Other fun things to do can be found around Plaza Hidalgo near the big downtown hotels; Carapan, Av. Hidalgo #305 Oriente, offers a variety of high-quality merchandise. The House of Crafts (Casa de las Artesanías) is just east of Gran Plaza at avenidas Dr. Coss and Allende.

The Zona Rosa runs along Calle Morelos in the vicinity of Gran Plaza. Craft shops, fashionable boutiques, local restaurants and nightclubs line an open mall several blocks long and 2 blocks wide, reserved for pedestrians only and probably best during daylight hours.

## **Special Events**

Starting on Palm Sunday, the 2-week Spring Fair (Feria de Primavera) festivities offer parades, art expositions, auto races and other things to see. The Festival of the Virgin of Guadalupe takes place in the destination during the first half of December.

Bullfights are held periodically between May and December at the Plaza de Toros bullring, located south of Niños Heroes Park at avenidas Ruíz Cortines and Alfonso Reves; phone (81) 8374-0505 for schedule information, or visit ticketmaster.com.mx. Feats of horsemanship characterize *charreadas*, or Mexican-style rodeos, held Sunday mornings at ranches in the eastern suburb of Villa de Guadalupe. If you plan to travel there, follow the signs reading "Lienzo Charro" posted along free Mex. 40 in the direction of Reynosa. For more information on what to do, including dates and times, contact Monterrey Infotur.

Monterrey Infotur: Av. 5 de Mayo #525 Oriente (West) between avs. Mariano Escobedo and Ignacio Zaragoza, on the third floor of the Elizondo Páez building. The office is open Mon.-Fri. 9-6:30. Phone: 01 (800) 832-2200 (tollfree long distance within Mexico).

**BISHOP'S PALACE** (El Obispado) is in the western part of the city at the w. end of Av. Padre Mier. It was built by Fray José Rafael Verger in 1787, a year of famine, to employ Indian victims of a severe drought. During the

Mexican-American War, it resisted an onslaught by the invading U.S. Army for 2 days after the city had fallen. The building also served as a stronghold against the French in 1864, as a hospital during a 1903 yellow fever epidemic, and as temporary quarters for Pancho Villa during the 1910 Revolution. On smog-free days it offers a wonderful view of the city.

Regional Museum of Nuevo León (Museo Regional de Nuevo León) is inside Bishop's Palace, in the western part of the city at the w. end of Av. Padre Mier. It has displays tracing the industrial, cultural and artistic development of the Monterrey area. Of note are the guns that were used to execute self-proclaimed Emperor Archduke Maximilian. Phone: (81) 8346-0404.

HEINEKEN BREWERY (Cervecería Cuauhtémoc) is n. of downtown at Av. Universidad #2002 Norte, following signs; there is no street parking, but limited free parking is available within the entrance gate. Bohemia, Tecate and Carta Blanca beers are produced at the rate of more than a million bottles a day; free samples are served in the large beer garden.

Visitors taking the brewery tour must wear an orange vest and safety goggles and be able to climb steep, narrow metal stairs. Note: At time of publication tours were suspended. **Time:** Allow 2 hours minimum. **Phone:** (81) 8328-5000. TI

**GRAN PLAZA** is bounded by Av. 5 de Mayo on the north and Av. Constitución on the south. Monterrey's immense central plaza is one of the world's largest city squares. Also known as the Macro Plaza, its construction during the 1980s helped revitalize the downtown area. Graced by fountains, statuary, gardens and boldly modern buildings, the 100-acre expanse stretches from City Hall (Palacio Municipal) north to the Government Palace (Palacio de Gobierno). Several streets pass beneath the raised plaza, helping to alleviate traffic congestion.

Beacon of Commerce (Faro del Comercio) stands in the center of Plaza Zaragoza. This 230-foot-tall, bright-orange laser beam tower dominates the plaza and bathes it with areen light in the evenings.

Cathedral is on Calle Zuazua at the southern end of Gran Plaza. Built over a period of more than 2 centuries, it exhibits different architectural styles; the pale yellow facade is baroque, while Plateresque decoration adorns the entrance door.

Esplanade of the Heroes (Explanada de Los Héroes) is just s. of the Government Palace. This is the most formal looking part of Gran Plaza in terms of its resemblance to a traditional Mexican plaza. It contains monuments to



Mexican historical figures Father Miguel Hidalgo, Benito Juárez and José María Morelos. Just south is the Hidden Garden (Bosque Hundido), a relaxing green space with trees, burbling fountains and sculptures.

**Fountain of Life** (Fuente de la Vida) is in the center of Gran Plaza between avenidas Matamoros and Padre Mier. This impressive fountain boasts a bronze statue of Neptune surrounded by cavorting steeds and nymphs.

Government Palace (Palacio Gobierno) anchors the n. end of Gran Plaza, just south of Av. 5 de Mayo. The Nuevo León state capitol, this Spanish colonial-style building was built in 1908 of pink stone quarried from around San Luis Potosí; it has a typically Spanish patio.

**Plaza Hidalgo** is across Gran Plaza from the cathedral. Another traditional Mexican square, Hidalgo is framed with colonial-style buildings and dotted with shops and little outdoor cafes.

HEROIC CHILDREN'S PARK (Parque Niños Héroes) is on Av. Alfonso Reyes, about 4 km (2.5 mi.) n. of downtown and just s. of Nuevo León State University. It was named in honor of the young cadets who defended Mexico City's Chapultepec Castle from U.S. forces during the Mexican-American War; they committed suicide by leaping from the castle battlements rather than surrendering.

This large, fenced-in recreational complex is family oriented and one of the best places in the city to go for outdoor activities. There are playgrounds, plenty of picnic areas, several adjoining man-made ponds stocked for fishing and an athletic area for jogging and track events.

Also within the park are botanical gardens; an aviary; a baseball stadium; a museum of automobiles; the Museum of Fauna and Natural Sciences (Museo de la Fauna y Ciencias Naturales), with numerous animal displays; and the Nuevo León Art Gallery (Pinacoteca de Nuevo León), which surveys the state's artistic heritage. The facilities are scattered throughout the extensive park grounds, connected by tree-shaded paths.

MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART (Museo de Arte Contemporaneo) is at calles Zuazua and Ocampo at the southern end of Gran Plaza, next to the cathedral. MARCO, as this museum is popularly known, is a spacious, ultramodern building designed by noted Mexican architect Ricardo Legorreta. Exhibits in the 14 galleries emphasize Mexican and Latin American artists, including works by 20th-century masters Diego Rivera and David Alfaro Siqueiros. Cutting-edge artist Juan Soriano created the gigantic bronze sculpture of a dove, "La Paloma," that stands at the front entrance.

**Time:** Allow 2 hours minimum. **Phone:** (81) 8262-4500.

MUSEUM OF MEXICAN HISTORY (Museo de Historia Mexicana) is in the center of the downtown historic area at Calle Dr. Coss #445. The top floor of this large, two-story building across from the main plaza is devoted to the history of Mexico from prehistoric times to the present. Exhibits organized by century feature ancient clay artifacts, tools and foods; the evolution of Mexican textiles; transportation, religion and politics; and such cultural mainstays as music and TV shows.

Underground burial vaults and grain storage are depicted through the use of a Plexiglas floor. The downstairs section has rotating exhibits and the Hall of Ivories (Sala de Marfiles), displaying silver crowns and other decorative objects. Next door is the Museum of the Northeast (Museo de Noreste), with exhibits focusing on northern Mexican history and the region's cultural ties to Texas. Across the street is the Palace Museum (Museo del Palacio). **Phone:** (81) 2033-9898.

## **Nearby Destinations**

GARCÍA CAVES (Grutas de García) are n.w. of downtown Monterrey via Mex. 40. A paved road runs to the caves, which are about 8 km (5 mi.) east of the village of Villa de García. Discovered about 1843 by parish priest Juan Antonio Sobrevilla, these caves are among the largest and most beautiful in Mexico. Their estimated age is 50 to 60 million years; it is presumed the caves were once submerged due to the shellfish fossils scattered over the walls and ceilings. Ten "rooms" contain stalagmite and stalactite formations.

A swimming pool, restaurants, and picnic and recreational areas cluster at the foot of the mountain where the caves are located. From the parking area, a cable car transports visitors past rugged scenery to the cavern entrance, tucked high on the side of a cliff. The cement passageways connecting the caves are well lighted. **Phone:** (81) 8396-1128.

HUASTECA CANYON is about 32 km (20 mi.) w. of Monterrey on Mex. 40 to the village of Santa Catarina, then 3 km (2 mi.) s. The magnificent rock gorge of Huasteca (wahs-TEH-kah) is located in Monterrey Heights National Park (Parque Nacional Cumbres de Monterrey). The sheer walls reach heights of 750 to 1,000 feet. In places the softer rock has been eroded into curious formations. Restrooms, a snack bar and picnic areas are on site.

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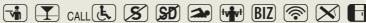


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Hotel. Address: Ave Insurgentess 4001 Col Colinas. Location: Modern commercial area next to Gallerias shopping complex. Facility: 98 units. 6 stories, interior corridors. Amenities: safes. Pool: outdoor. Activities: exercise room. Guest Services: valet laundry.

























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#### WHERE TO EAT



THE BISTRO 81/8133-5400



Italian Casual Dining. Address: Ave Diego Rivera No 2492 66269.

# SALTILLO, COAHUILA

Note: For current information about safety/security issues in Saltillo, refer to the U.S. State Department website (travel.state.gov).

About 85 kilometers (53 miles) southwest of Monterrey on Mex. 40, Saltillo (sahl-TEE-yoh) is the capital of and leading industrial city in the state of Coahuila. Because of altitude and the resulting dry, mild climate, golf, tennis, polo and swimming are popular summer recreational pursuits.

The city's annual feria (fair) takes place the first half of August.

There are two downtown plazas. Dignified monuments and well-preserved colonial buildings line the streets around Plaza de Armas. The feeling of formality is reinforced by its paved surface, a central fountain overlooked by four female statues, and the lack of trees and benches. The plaza is flanked by the city's grand 18th-century cathedral and the Government Palace (Palacio de Gobierno), which contains murals illustrating regional history.

Please refer to pages 10-11 for Inspected Clean details.

Much livelier is Plaza Acuña, 2 blocks northwest. Here there are an abundance of shops, and the square is ringed with little cafes and bars. Occupying one corner is Mercado Juárez, which is a good place to browse for handicrafts, sarapes (woolen blankets), rugs, pottery, silverwork and bizarre-looking tin masks. Wandering musicians entertain families and visitors soaking up the local atmosphere.

A monument to Emilio Carranza, who made the first nonstop flight from Mexico City to New York, stands along Calle Victoria. The street begins at the Alameda, a shady park just west of Plaza de Armas that is frequented by students and joggers. Here stands an equestrian statue of General Ignacio Zaragoza, hero of the 1862 Battle of Puebla. Zaragoza was born in 1829 in Bahía del Espíritu Santo, near what is now Goliad, Tex. The central bus station is southwest of downtown on Boulevard Luis Echeverría.

Coahuila State Tourism Office (Instituto Estatal de Turismo): Blvd. Venustiano Carranza #3206 in the Latinoamericana district of the city. Phone: (844) 439-2745, or 01 (800) 718-4220 (toll-free long distance within Mexico).

#### SAN PEDRO GARZA GARCIA



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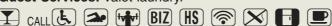
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Hotel. Address: Av Del Roble 670 Valle Del Campestre. Location: Located in the Arbodela shopping complex. Facility: Opened in 2022

in the upscale Arboleda shopping complex, this striking hotel offers spectacular public areas, fine dining and luxurious rooms. Everything is refined and striking. Meets AAA guest room security requirements. 250 units, some kitchens. 10 stories, interior corridors. Parking: on-site (fee). Amenities: safes. Pool: heated outdoor. Activities: exercise room, spa. Guest Services: valet laundry.























THE WESTIN MONTERREY VALLE BOOK NOW 81/2713-3100





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Hotel. Address: Av Manuel Gomez Morin & Rio Missouri Punta Valle 66220. Facility: Meets AAA guest room security requirements. 174 units. 9 stories. interior corridors. Parking: on-site (fee). Amenities: safes. Pool: heated outdoor. Activities: exercise room. Guest Services: valet laundry.



























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# **The Pacific Coast**

Iso known as the Mexican Riviera, Mexico's Pacific Coast boasts hundreds of miles of surf-pounded shoreline and a string of destinations stretching from Mazatlán south to Bahías de Huatulco. They range from funky beach communities—traditional getaways for the budget conscious and Mexican families of modest means—to luxurious oceanfront retreats catering to the well-heeled international set.

The Mexican Riviera unofficially begins at Mazatlán, "the Pearl of the Pacific." The name is derived from the Náhuatl Indian word *mazatl*, meaning "place of deer"—a

reference to former inhabitants, as these fleet creatures are nowhere to be seen in the midst of today's oceanfront bustle. Strung along miles of scenic Pacific shoreline, the city is northwestern Mexico's major beach destination.

In Manzanillo sun, sea and sand mix with the matter-offact grime of a real working city. Sport fishing is one of the big draws. The place all but shuts down on Sunday, when practically everyone heads to the beach.

Puerto Vallarta was a tiny fishing village blessed with a stunning natural backdrop when director John Huston filmed "The Night of the Iguana" on location in 1963. The torrid romance between star Richard Burton and tagalong

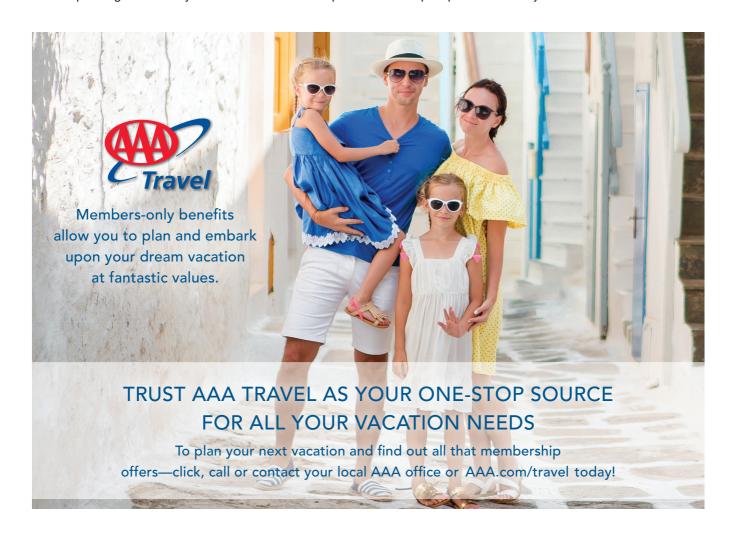
Elizabeth Taylor—both of whom were married to others titillated millions and generated an avalanche of publicity. Visitors came pouring in, hoping to glimpse a movie star. and an international destination was born. PV combines an idyllic locale with a full spectrum of resort amenities.

Ixtapa and Zihuatanejo are twin resorts, only 4 miles apart but decidedly different in atmosphere. Ixtapa, created in the early 1970s, has an upscale but planned look; Zihuatanejo, founded by Spanish conquistadores in the early 16th century, is much more down-home.

Certainly Acapulco fulfills the scenic requirements for a tropical resort. Lofty mountains and green foothills extend to the sparkling blue of bay and ocean waters. Tall palm trees stand silhouetted against picturesque sunsets. And the view of Acapulco Bay at night, set off by thousands of city lights, is breathtaking.

Rounding out the Riviera is Bahías de Huatulco, built along a series of bays that scallop the Pacific coast like a necklace of aquamarine jewels. Located on the Pacific Coast in Oaxaca, one of Mexico's poorest states, Huatulco is visited mostly by Mexican families, European tourists, diving enthusiasts and backpackers.

AAA recommends that travelers consult online U.S. State Department travel advisories when planning traveling abroad. Find this information at travel.state.gov/ content/passports/en/country/mexico.html.





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# capulco

City Population: 779,566 Elevation: 13 meters (43 feet)

# **Editor's Picks:**

Acapulco Historical Museum	(see <sub>l</sub>	p.	264)
La Quebrada	(see	p.	264)
Pie de la Cuesta	(see	p.	265)

# **GOOD FACTS TO KNOW**

## WHOM TO CALL

Police (emergency): Dial 911 and ask to be connected to an English-speaking operator.

Police Assistance: English-speaking "tourist police" outfitted in white and light blue uniforms patrol streets in tourist areas and can provide assistance to visitors. Phone (744) 485-0490.

LOCATEL: (provides assistance in locating vehicles or missing persons, or to those in need of public services): (744) 481-1100. The office is at Boulevard Costera Miguel Àlemán #3221.

Hospitals: Hospital Privado Magallanes, Calle Wilfrido Massieu Perez #2, (744) 485-6544; IMSS (Mexican Social Security Hospital), downtown at Av. Cuauhtémoc #95, (744) 469-0270; Red Cross (Cruz Roja), Calle Andrea Dorian #1 (off Boulevard Costera Miguel Alemán), (744) 481-3385. Many hotels have an in-house doctor or a contact physician on 24-hour call

Local Phone Calls: Public phones take prepaid Ladatel/Telmex phone cards, which can be purchased at any convenience store. The smallest card value is 30 pesos; local calls cost only a couple of pesos, depending on the time the call is made. Insert the card chip side up and then

dial your call; an LED display shows the remaining value of the card after the call is finished.

Calls to a cellphone must be preceded by 044, then the 744 area code and the seven-digit phone number. Avoid making phone calls from your hotel room, as the rate you'll be charged is apt to be outrageous.

#### WHERE TO LOOK

#### **Publications**

Sanborns, a Mexican restaurant chain, has English-language books and periodicals. There are locations at Boulevard Costera Miguel Alemán #3111 (several blocks south of the El Rollo Acapulco water park), Boulevard Costera Miguel Alemán #1260 (in the vicinity of Playa Calinda) and at Boulevard Costera Miguel Alemán #209 in old downtown Acapulco.

#### **Visitor Information**

State of Guerrero Tourism Office (Secretaría de Fomento Turístico): Boulevard Miguel Alemán #4455 (in the Acapulco International Center). The office provides maps as well as tourist assistance Mon.-Fri. 8-3:30. Phone: (744) 484-4416.

## WHAT TO KNOW

#### **Currency Exchange**

Most banks along the Costera, both in the downtown area and the hotel zone, are open Mon.-Fri. 9-5 (some also Sat. 10-2). Casas de cambio (currency exchange houses) line the Costera in the vicinity of the big hotels; these are open daily and often until 8 p.m. ATMs are plentiful and accept international credit cards; withdrawals are in pesos.

### Staying Safe

In recent years Acapulco has experienced high-profile incidents of drug cartel-related violence, some of which have occurred in or near tourist areas. If you leave your hotel, stick to areas frequented by visitors (the beaches and tourist-oriented businesses along Boulevard Costera Miguel Alemán). The old downtown area is also safe during daylight hours. Tourists often are targeted for petty theft; stay alert if you happen to be in a crowded public place, like a market. Never carry large sums of money or personal valuables and always keep your hotel room key card with you, preferably in a hidden pocket or other safe place.

Travel Advisory: We do not recommend travel to the state of Guerrero due to the U.S. Department of State's "Do Not Travel" warning. The acute level of crime and violence in this area prohibits AAA inspections.

Acapulco has been around since the turn of the 16th century, when it was established as an authorized trading port between the Americas and Asia and galleons laden with exotic goods began sailing back and forth across the Pacific. But it wasn't until 1927 that a road was cut through the rugged Sierra Madre Mountains, connecting Mexico City to this unremarkable fishing village located on a sheltered bay. And when international air service was established in 1964, Acapulco was catapulted head-first into the resort age.

In the 1960s and '70s this was Mexico's most notorious party destination, the darling of the international and Hollywood jet sets. Movie stars like John Wayne, Johnny Weissmuller, Elizabeth Taylor and Rita Hayworth lounged at luxurious hotels. Elvis Presley and Ursula Andress had "Fun in Acapulco," a 1963 movie starring the King as a lifeguard and hotel singer who serenaded audiences with the ditty "Bossa Nova Baby." The shore along Acapulco Bay was transformed into a 9-mile swath of glitter and indulgence patronized by la gente bonita (the beautiful people).

Take a random poll today and you'll likely find that Cancún is Mexico's beach of choice for many tourists. But Acapulco retains its popularity, especially among Mexican vacationers. The weather is always balmy, and the water is warm enough for swimming year-round. November is one of the nicest months to visit, as high-season prices haven't yet kicked in. Formality can be left at home with your coat; standard attire consists of shorts, T-shirts and the occasional scandalous bathing suit.

Acapulco isn't known for dignified historical monuments. It's a big city and an important commercial center, but the economy depends most heavily on the tourist trade. In addition to letting life's cares melt away at the beach, water recreation and watching the clavadistas (cliff divers) hurl themselves from the top of La Quebrada are some of the city's favorite things to do.

As is the case at some of Mexico's other resort destinations, there are two Acapulcos. The flashy, pretty Acapulco along the immediate bayfront caters to tourists, while the Acapulco that spreads over the hills above the beaches—poverty ridden, with dusty, potholed streets and little police protection—is where many of the taxi drivers, chambermaids, waiters and other workers who depend on the tourist industry live. It also is where almost all of the city's highly publicized incidents of drug-related violence have taken place.

If you have money to burn, you'll have a fabulous time. The big resort hotels shepherd guests to private villas bedecked with fresh flowers, and their amenities include some of Mexico's most impressive swimming pool complexes. Alfresco tables at an intimate little restaurant, tucked on a hillside with a swooning view of Acapulco Bay, make dining out a romantic special event. And the city's fabled nightlife lives up to its reputation.

# **Getting There**

## By Air

Acapulco International Airport (officially Juan N. Alvarez International Airport) is about 23 kilometers (14 miles) southeast of the city off Boulevard de las Naciones. Major carriers frequently fly into Mexico City, where connections can be made to Acapulco.

United offers seasonal nonstop flights from Houston. Providing service from Mexico City are Aeroméxico, phone 01 (800) 021-4000 (toll-free long distance within Mexico) and Volaris, phone (55) 1102-8000. Charter flights from Canada are available seasonally. For additional information about airlines see Arriving by Air, page p. 28.

Best Day is an airport shuttle/taxi service that transports visitors from the airport to the city's hotel zone along Boulevard Costera Miguel Alemán. The 30-minute ride in a shared minivan (colectivo) costs about \$18-\$22 (U.S.) per person; a non-shared minivan starts at about \$60, depending on the destination. Phone 01 (800) 237-8329 (toll-free long distance within Mexico) or (800) 593-6259 (from the United States).

# By Car

From Mexico City, toll highway Mex. 95-D, the Autopista del Sol (Sun Highway), is by far the quickest and best option. Between Mexico City and Cuernavaca the funnel highway is Mex. 95-D; just south of Cuernavaca, the Sun Highway splits off from old Mex. 95-D, proceeds south to Chilpancingo and Tierra Colorada, and then on to Acapulco International Airport. Total driving time for the 240mile stretch is around 4 hours.

The four-lane, largely traffic-free highway twists and turns through beautiful valleys and around mountainous curves. Signs denote scenic stops. About halfway to Acapulco a suspension bridge 600 feet above the Mexcala River affords a spectacular view; acrophobes will probably want to keep their eyes shut.

The one drawback to traveling this well-maintained route is the cost. There are frequent toll plazas along the route, and the total charge runs about \$80 (U.S.). Tolls must be paid for and gas must be purchased in pesos. The highway is economically out of the question for the average Mexican driver; most of the traffic is luxury buses, long-distance trucks and tourists willing to pay for convenience.

Mex. 95, an older, free highway, begins at Mexico City and proceeds south through Cuernavaca, Taxco, Iguala and Chilpancingo to Acapulco, roughly paralleling toll Mex. 95-D. It's scenic, but also very winding.

Acapulco is a long way from the United States; from McAllen, Tex., one of the closest U.S. border points, the distance is nearly 900 miles.

## By Bus

First-class (ejecutivo) buses operated by Tres Estrellas de Oro make daily runs on the Autopista del Sol between Mexico City's Terminal Central de Autobuses del Sur and Acapulco; the trip takes 5 to 6 hours and costs about \$30 (U.S.) one way. This bus line also provides service to Taxco, Ixtapa and Zihuatanejo. Buses coming from Mexico City on Friday and departing Acapulco on Monday are often very crowded. For additional information about buses see Bus Service, page p. 36.

## By Cruise Ship

Due to ongoing Mexican drug cartel violence and wary American tourists, many major cruise lines have omitted Acapulco from their Pacific Mexico itineraries. Oceania Cruises, Regent Seven Seas Cruises and the Norwegian Cruise Line still occasionally visit, docking at Puerto Acapulco near the old downtown area. Your ship's excursion manager can book you on a tour of the city. Onshore visits typically include Fort San Diego, across the street from where cruise ships moor, and La Quebrada, where the cliff divers perform.

# **Getting Around**

# City Layout

Acapulco is divided into three sections. The oldest part, appropriately referred to as Old Acapulco (or "Tradicional") fills a peninsula that forms the western side of Acapulco Bay. This is where locals as well as U.S. and Canadian retirees attend to their daily business. It's compact, bustling and has a very Mexican feel, a definite contrast to the more tourist-oriented parts of the city.

The downtown waterfront contains the docks and fishermen's wharves, reminders of Acapulco's continuing importance as a commercial port. This is where both cruise ships and smaller fishing boats dock. Historic Fort San Diego is in this area. Old Acapulco also includes Caletilla and the other city beaches as far east as the first hotel high-rise.

Boulevard Miguel Alemán runs through the Dorado (or Golden Zone) section of the city. This wide boulevard following the northern shore of Acapulco Bay is also called the Costera and was named for the former Mexican president who was responsible for initiating much of the city's resort development. Luxury hotels, restaurants, shops, familyoriented attractions and beaches like Playa Hornos and Playa la Condesa are located in the Golden Zone, which continues as far as the Las Brisas hotel, east of the junction with Mex. 95 (the highway to Taxco and Mexico City).

Beyond this point is the newest section, Punta Diamante (the Diamond Zone). Here the coastal drive is



called the Carretera Escénica and continues along Acapulco Bay toward Puerto Marqués and, farther on, the airport. Another group of luxury hotels, like the Hotel Princess Mundo Imperial and the Pierre Mundo Imperial. are clustered in the Punta Diamante area.

As in many other parts of Mexico, streets change names frequently and street signs are difficult to locate. Orient yourself by using the Costera as a reference point—the great majority of Acapulco's accommodations, restaurants and nightspots are on or a short distance off it.

#### **Rental Cars**

Hertz is one of several rental car agencies with offices in Acapulco. Be sure you fully understand the terms of any rental contract. Some luxury hotels provide jeeps for their guests.

Note: AAA members enjoy discounts through Hertz for vehicles booked in the United States. Consult your local AAA club or phone Hertz, (800) 654-3080.

#### **Buses**

Blue-and-white buses with "Costera" printed on the side travel up and down Boulevard Miguel Alemán, connecting beaches and various points of interest. The fare is inexpensive (5 pesos), but the ride is often bumpy and hot, and these buses are usually crowded as well. Maps at covered bus stops along the Costera illustrate routes to major hotels and tourist attractions. If you're taking the bus to an outlying area like Pie de la Cuesta or Puerto Margués, find



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out when and where to board the last bus going back into town. Stay alert while on the bus and beware of pickpockets, who sometimes target foreign tourists.

#### **Taxis**

Yellow-and-while *colectivo* taxis travel along the Costera and charge 10 pesos per person. Fares charged by blueand-white "tourist" taxis typically begin at around 50 pesos. Taking a sitio taxi associated with your hotel is more expensive but also much safer, especially after dark. Lists showing rates for *sitio* taxis are usually posted in the hotel lobby. Hail cabs cruising the streets at your own risk, as robberies can occur.

## **Parking**

Old Acapulco has narrow streets and is better suited to walking than driving. It is illegal to park anywhere along Costera Miguel Alemán. Since everything is spread out, use city buses or take a taxi where you want to go.

#### **Guides/Tours**

A guide is not really necessary in Acapulco since the focus for most vacationers is on the beach, nightlife and eating out. If you do hire one, make certain he or she is a reputable, bonded guide licensed by the Guerrero State Department of Tourism. Freelance guides can usually be found in the lobbies or at the entrances of the more expensive hotels.

Local tour operators offer organized city tours, day trips to Taxco or evening nightclub tours. Tour desks are at the larger hotels. Acuario Tours is a representative agency. The office is in Old Acapulco at Costera Miguel Alemán #186-3; phone (744) 469-6100.

# What To See

CHAPEL OF PEACE (La Capilla de la Paz) is off Carretera Escénica, the southern extension of Boulevard Miguel Alemán, in the exclusive Las Brisas residential neighborhood. Standing high on a hilltop, this modern, non-denominational open-air chapel is distinguished by a white cross standing 130 feet tall, a landmark that can be seen from almost anywhere in the city. Overlooking the southern end of Acapulco Bay at an elevation of 1,200 feet above sea level—the city's highest point—the chapel grounds offer spectacular views and the best photo ops in town. Cascading water and well-kept gardens add to the beauty of this peaceful spot.

The best way to visit the chapel is to hire a driver/guide for the steep drive to the mountaintop, complete with glimpses of beautiful homes precariously perched on hillsides. The best time to go is in the evening in order to witness the sun setting over the bay. For a truly stunning

photo, stake out a spot near The Hands of Brotherhood (Las Manos de la Hermandad) sculpture; the clasped hands provide a perfect framing feature.

FORT SAN DIEGO (El Fuerte de San Diego) stands on a hill e. of the main plaza in Old Acapulco, overlooking the city's harbor and port facilities. Originally constructed in 1616 as a series of ramparts to ward off Sir Francis Drake and other marauding pirates, the fort was extensively damaged by an earthquake and rebuilt in 1776 in the shape of a five-point star. In 1813, in the midst of Mexico's War of Independence, Gen. José María Morelos attacked the fort; after a 4-month siege the Spanish capitulated. giving up not only a lucrative trading base but their most important fortress on the Pacific coast. Phone: (744) 482-3828 or (744) 482-1114.

Acapulco Historical Museum (Museo Histórico de Acapulco) is within Fort San Diego. Fifteen exhibition rooms document the region's indigenous peoples, the exploits of Spanish *conquistadores* and swashbuckling pirates, Mexico's independence from Spain, and in particular Acapulco's importance as a stop on the trade route between Spain and the Philippines. Artifacts and items on display include cannons, navigational instruments, religious artifacts, masks and figurines, and a collection of china plates and bowls. Display information is in English and Spanish. **Note:** Flash cameras are not permitted. **Phone:** (744) 482-3828.

LA QUEBRADA is high above downtown Acapulco; from the cathedral, take Calle La Quebrada about 4 blks. w. Watching cliff divers (clavadistas) plunge from atop this natural rock wall into a narrow cove bordered by treacherous rocks some 135 feet below is perhaps the signature Acapulco experience. These fearless young men (after saying a prayer at a small shrine on the cliffs) stand on a ledge illuminated by a spotlight and then perform a dive that relies on split-second timing; the tide fills the cove with swirling surf and then recedes quickly, leaving the water level as low as 12 feet for a brief period.

You can watch the divers from a public observation deck next to the El Mirador Acapulco hotel; arrive early for the best views. The hotel's La Perla restaurant also offers meal seatings for the evening performances. Phone: (744) 483-1260 (Mirador Hotel). 📆

## What To Do

#### Restaurants

Although Acapulco has its share of local hangouts dishing up tacos and other regional Mexican fare, it's worth getting casually dressed up (no tie or jacket, but no



shorts or jeans either) and splurging at a hotel restaurant. The view of the bay from a rooftop establishment at dusk, when city lights start to twinkle, is reliably breathtaking.

The bigger hotel restaurants offer a wide selection of standard international and trendy fusion cuisine as well as local specialties. Prices tend toward the expensive side (dinner for two without drinks, wine or tip will be upwards of \$60), but food quality and a luxurious setting help compensate. Atmosphere and entertainment vary with the establishment. Dinner rarely begins before 9 p.m., although some hotel restaurants begin serving around 6 or 7.

Along Costera Miguel Alemán there are numerous palapa (thatch-roofed) places to eat with a seafood menu and a funky air. Look for those where people are eating and not just having a drink. The Costera also has no shortage of rib and hamburger joints, where big portions, potent libations, wild decorations and a wilder crowd are the rule. Those homesick for fast food will find the usual American outlets lining the Costera, although prices are not cheap.

You can get an authentic Mexican meal at the traditional restaurants around Plaza Alvarez in Old Town Acapulco. Typically the *comida corrida* (lunch special) is a bargain, with soup, rice or noodles, an entree and dessert or coffee for a very reasonable price. Neighborhood street stands sell fresh seafood, but use caution when purchasing any food item from street vendors—if it's not fresh, your stomach could regret it.

In most restaurants it is customary to leave a tip (propina) of 10 to 15 percent. Establishments catering to tourists normally use purified water to cook vegetables and wash produce. At smaller places or if in doubt, order bottled water, juice, soda or beer, and ask for drinks without ice cubes. See the Lodgings & Restaurants section for AAA Diamond designated dining establishments.

# Shopping

Artesanías Finas de Acapulco, more commonly known as AFA-ACA, is a one-stop department store where you'll find carved wooden masks, folk art, jewelry, furniture, onyx chessboards, pottery, luggage and other items. Quality varies, from cheap mass-produced souvenirs to fine craftsmanship. It's just off Boulevard Costera Miguel Alemán at Avenida Horatio Nelson (near the Baby'O disco).

One of Acapulco's nicest malls is La Isla Shopping Village Acapulco, on Boulevard de las Naciones in the vicinity of Puerto Margues. It has more than 150 shops and boutiques (Lacoste, Tommy Hilfiger, Quiksilver), plus Liverpool, a high-end Mexican department store. You'll also find local restaurants, a cinema multiplex and a turtle pool. For a fee you can go for a gondola ride that glides along a manmade waterway. Everything is laid out along a canal in a landscaped setting of fountains and outdoor cafés, and if it looks like the mall of the same name in Cancún, there's a reason: They share the same developer.

Another snazzy mall is Galerías Diana, on the inland side of the Boulevard Costera Miguel Alemán just west of the Diana traffic circle (across from the Hotel Emporio Acapulco). Several levels of shops and boutiques surround a vaulted atrium. The movie multiplex Cinépolis offers bar service and leather lounge chairs outside the individual theaters. There's also a video arcade for kids, slot machines, a sports bar and, if you're suffering from a lack of lattes during your vacation, there's a Starbucks outlet on the main floor of the atrium.

La Gran Plaza, on Costera Miguel Alemán opposite the Ritz Acapulco Hotel, has six different "plazas" spread out on two levels. Retailers range from Fábricas de Francia, a top-of-the-line clothing and housewares store, fashion boutiques and jewelry stores to craft shops run by Huichol Indians. There are also drugstores, currency exchange offices, travel agencies and other businesses. The mall has plenty of ATMs as well. There's a nice food court and a game-oriented playground for kids.

Most hotels have their own specialty shops; the plush shopping arcade at the Princess Mundo Imperial is worth stopping by during your trip, if just to ogle the merchandise.

#### **Beaches**

Although Acapulco Bay is anchored by a commercial port at one end and a naval base at the other, there's still plenty of room in between for a swath of sand broken only by a few rock outcroppings. More secluded beaches stretch northwest of the bay along the Pacific coastline. Keep in mind that all beaches in Mexico are federally owned property and therefore public, even stretches that may seem private because they are in front of a big hotel.

Chairs, umbrellas, showers, hammocks and refreshments are available at most locations; avoid isolated beaches. Due to unpredictable or rough surf conditions, the beaches facing the open ocean, northwest of more protected Acapulco Bay, are better suited for watching the sky turn a pretty pink at sunset or taking a romantic stroll along the sand than they are for swimming. The following beaches are listed alphabetically.

PIE DE LA CUESTA is about 16 km (10 mi.) n.w. of Acapulco off Mex. 200. This village (its name means "foot of the hill") is an easy day trip by car or taxi. The open beach stretches for about 6 miles. On the opposite side of the coastal road is the large expanse of Coyuca Lagoon, its shoreline edged with palms and mangroves. Boat rides, freshwater fishing and water skiing are popular activities here.

Thatch-roofed restaurants line the beach, and it's a nice place to chill out in a hammock. Crashing breakers and treacherous currents make swimming or body surfing very risky, however, and there are no lifeguards. Much safer is watching the sun set. Families line up rows of chairs, and vendors mill around selling snacks and trinkets. If there are clouds, the patterns of color are often magnificent; if the sky is clear the Pacific turns to pale gold as the sun drops below the horizon.

PLAYA CALETA is along the peninsula in Old Acapulco. Caleta Beach and its twin, Playa Caletilla, were the jet setter beaches of choice in the 1960s, but today they cater more to Mexican families. The water is very calm here, since the island of La Roqueta deflects the brunt of Pacific currents. Inner tubes and other water sports equipment can be rented. Roaming vendors sell all sorts of trinkets and snacks.

La Roqueta can be reached by a 15-minute trip aboard a motorboat or glass-bottom boat. This is a peaceful place to sunbathe, snorkel, windsurf or just take a walk to the lighthouse. Beach chairs, inner tubes and canoes can be rented.

Standing submerged in the harbor near La Roqueta is a bronze statue of the Virgin of Guadalupe. The shrine is best seen on a glass-bottom boat ride, as it is not easily visible from the surface. Round-trip boat tickets can be purchased at Caleta Beach; the boat stops for a view of the statue en route to the island.

**PLAYA HORNOS** is just off Costera Miguel Alemán near Papagayo Park. Twin beaches Hornos and Hornitos are packed with both tourists and local families. Here the bay is calm, palm trees shade the sand and numerous casual, thatched-roof restaurants line the beach.

PLAYA LA CONDESA is in the center of the Golden Zone. Popular La Condesa Beach is crowded with attractive young singles flaunting daring swimwear—although you could say this about most Acapulco beaches—and is a place to watch parasailers do their adrenaline-fueled thing. The waves can get fairly big, which makes boogie boarding popular. The water gets deep quickly, however, so use caution when swimming. Lounge chairs and umbrellas can be rented. Vendors hawking trinkets also roam this beach. There are numerous restaurants and bars along nearby Costera Miguel Alemán.

PLAYA PUERTO MARQUÉS stretches e. of Acapulco along a narrow neck of little Puerto Marqués Bay. It has a backdrop of mountains, the waves are gentle and suitable for swimming, water skiing and sailing, and seafood shacks are literally at the water's edge. Another attraction is the drive along the Carretera Escénica (Scenic Highway), the eastward extension of Costera Miguel

Alemán that winds past Icacos Naval Base; it offers magnificent views looking back toward the city and Acapulco Bay. This beach is crowded with families on weekends.

PLAYA REVOLCADERO is just beyond Playa Puerto Marqués. On the ocean side of the highway running south to the airport, Revolcadero Beach is popular for swimming and surfing, although the waves can be rough and there is a powerful undertow; stay close to shore. The long, wide strip of sand, which fronts the Hotel Princess Mundo Imperial and Pierre Mundo Imperial hotel, is also ideal for a beachside horseback ride, which takes in Acapulco Bay from a distance. Riders should wear long pants, a hat and sunglasses and apply sunscreen. Check with your hotel concierge about guided riding trips.

## Sightseeing

Acapulco's vacation sights are scenic, not historic. Brightly decorated *calandrias* (horse-drawn carriages) regularly parade along Costera Miguel Alemán, and this is a leisurely way to tour this wide bayfront boulevard lined with beaches, hotels and local restaurants. Rates for a 20- to 30-minute ride vary; confirm the cost per person with the carriage operator before setting off.

Mexican muralist Diego Rivera asked art patron Dolores Olmedo, a longtime friend, to marry him after the death of his wife, painter Frida Kahlo. The Casa de Los Vientos (House of Winds) is surrounded by a wall covered with seashell murals that Rivera created while living here the last 2 years of his life. This small cultural center is occasionally open to the public for art exhibitions, but the exterior murals can be viewed any time. The house is on Calle Inalámbrica in the La Pinzona neighborhood, in Acapulco's old downtown area (a short cab ride from the central plaza).

Freshwater Coyuca Lagoon, northwest of Acapulco across from the beach at Pie de la Cuesta, is one of the most scenic places to go in Acapulco, threaded with jungle-lined canals choked with masses of floating water hyacinths. Within the lagoon is Isla de los Pajaros, a bird sanctuary home to black and white herons, pelicans and marabou storks. Lagoon sightseeing cruises include lunch at a beachfront restaurant and time to walk along the beach or just laze in a hammock. Local travel agencies book tours, or check with the concierge to see if your hotel offers an excursion.

Yachts that depart daily from the *malecón* offer afternoon, sunset and moonlight cruises around Acapulco Bay. Tickets can be purchased through local travel agencies. Lunch or dinner, music and dancing are usually part of the package. Glass-bottom boat tours to Roqueta Island depart from Caleta Beach and several other waterfront locations; check with a travel agency or your hotel for more information.

#### **Outdoor Recreation**

Deep-sea **fishing** for marlin, tuna, sailfish, dorado, roosterfish and red snapper is rewarding all year, although December through May is the peak season. There's also freshwater fishing in Tres Palos Lagoon and Coyuca Lagoon. Small boats can be rented, with catfish one of the most frequent catches. Favored places to go for inland river fishing are along the Río Papagayo, east of the city just beyond Tres Palos Lagoon, and the Río Coyuca, just beyond Coyuca Lagoon and west of Pie de la Cuesta beach.

Guides are available for hire, and fishing trips also can be arranged through your hotel or the Pesca Deportiva, near the dock across from the main plaza. Rates are negotiable; look for a reliable outfitter with equipment that looks like it's in good, safe condition, and make arrangements ahead of time. A boat plus experienced crew for a deep-sea excursion can be rented by the day; these trips usually leave in the early morning and return in the early afternoon. Make arrangements ahead of time. A Mexican fishing license is required, but the outfitter often will take care of this for you.

Almost every type of **boating** can be enjoyed. Sailboats, speedboats, catamarans and other pleasure craft prevail on the bay. Yachts and deep-sea fishing vessels can be rented as well. Arrange boat rentals through your hotel or a travel advisor. For larger vessels complete with crew, make reservations in advance. Canoes, paddleboats and other small craft can be rented at Caleta and Caletilla beaches.

Swimming in Acapulco Bay is popular due to the enticing hue of its waters. The rougher surf at Playa Revolcadero is favored by surfers. Pay particular heed to any warning flags posted, which can indicate hazardous water conditions or an occasional shark sighting. And almost every hotel has a pool, if not several. Some of them are huge, set against a backdrop of rustling palms and tropical plantings, and have swim-up bars. Luxury hotels provide their guests private or semiprivate pools.

All of the major hotels offer scuba diving lessons and equipment. The waters off Roqueta Island are especially conducive to dive explorations. The Acapulco Scuba Center, on Boulevard Costera Miguel Alemán at the eastern end of Acapulco Bay, offers dive packages with English-speaking instructors; phone (744) 482-9474.

Boats for water skiing can be booked at hotels as well. The gentler waters at Coyuca Lagoon are good for beginners. **Surfing** is not permitted at beaches along Acapulco Bay; the best place to surf is Revolcadero Beach, near Puerto Marqués.

Another popular sport is **parasailing**, although it is not without risks. From a standing position, a speedboat hauls

a "sailor" to a high altitude. Many parachute operators set up at Playa La Condesa. **Windsurfing** is good at Puerto Margués and also can be arranged at Caleta Beach. **Horseback riding** is popular along Playa Revolcadero.

## **Nightlife**

If you're looking for fun things to do with friends, don't miss Acapulco's glitzy dance clubs, which feature elaborate light shows, mirrored walls, fireworks and dance beats pounding from state-of-the-art sound systems. The music ranges from techno to house to hip-hop to Top 40. They start hopping around 10:30 p.m. and stay open until the wee hours. A dress code is standard (jeans and T-shirts are usually frowned on). Cover charges are steep (\$30 or more during the winter high season, less at other times), although they are sometimes waived to draw customers. Women normally pay a reduced charge. Bar drinks, of course, are extra.

One of the hottest places to go is Palladium Acapulco, on Carretera Escénica (Boulevard Costera Miguel Alemán) at Las Brisas. High on a hillside at the southern end of Acapulco Bay, it has glass windows 160 feet wide that look out over the water, giving dancers the feeling of being suspended in mid-air. Lighting and sound are top of the line, and as a result there's always a line to get in.

Baby'O, Costera Miguel Alemán #22, is a mainstay that has been around since the disco days of the '70s and is still going strong. The atmosphere here is akin to a very high-class cave pierced by laser lights, rumbling to the throb of techno, hip-hop and dance music.

The city's most celebrated nighttime destination is the diving from La Quebrada cliff (see attraction listing). Professionally trained young men perform these spectacular dives, which date back to 1934, when La Quebrada first became a popular spot for local divers to display their talent.

A successful dive depends as much on timing as on skill, since a diver enters a channel less than 25 feet wide and must wait for an opportunity when the water is deep enough to permit a safe entry at a speed of about 55 miles an hour. Getting to the top of the cliff is risky as well—barefoot divers scale the steep, vertical cliffside by grasping at rocky outcrops that occasionally snap off. Evening dives feature blazing torches that enhance the theatrical effect.

The traditional place to view the cliff divers is from the bar or terraces of the La Perla restaurant at the El Mirador Acapulco hotel, but you'll be required to pay a cover charge (which includes two drinks) or have dinner. Reservations are advised during the winter high season; phone (744) 483-1260.

The major hotels offer nightly entertainment, such as Mexican-style fiestas or theme parties, during the high tourist season. Live music often accompanies hotel bar or poolside cocktail bar happy hours, and there's also no shortage of evening floor shows.

## **Special Events**

The Acapulco Traditional Fair (Feria Tradicional de Acapulco) sets up near the Convention Center the week before Christmas and lasts through the week after New Year's Day. Those looking for fun things to do with kids will enjoy this event, which features carnival rides and games as well as hordes of vendors.

The Abierto Mexicano Telcel tennis tournament, held in late February or March, draws players from around the world. It takes place at the Hotel Princess Mundo Imperial.

The year's greatest influx of visitors is during Holy Week and the week after, marked by several religious observances. Many local businesses close, and the city becomes

so crowded that some people sleep on the beach. If you're planning your trip during this time, make reservations far in advance.

For music lovers, the Festival Acapulco (Acafest) in April draws participants from many countries. The offerings include everything from top-of-the-charts pop to traditional boleros, and are performed by orchestras, bands, trios and individual artists. Concerts are given at the Acapulco International Center, the Plaza de Toros bullring and at beaches, hotels and other open-air spots around the city.

The Virgin of Guadalupe is the focus of a nationwide pilgrimage on Dec. 12 to the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico City. In Acapulco this major religious observance is celebrated with street dances. Acapulco closes out the year with a huge party on New Year's Eve (Fiesta de Fin de Año), highlighted by fireworks exploding over Acapulco Bay.









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# BAHÍAS DE HUATULCO, OAXACA

FONATUR, Mexico's government-funded tourist development agency, officially inaugurated Bahías de Huatulco (wah-TOOL-co) in 1988, selecting a 22-mile stretch of bays, coves and inlets as the site for a master-planned vacation getaway. But while its resort aspects are a recent development, the settlement of Huatulco has been around for quite awhile.

Zapotec, Mixtec and Aztec merchants established a trade route through this region during pre-Hispanic times, and the coastal settlement of Santa Cruz Huatulco became a thriving port and shipyard. By the late 16th century, however, Acapulco had absorbed the galleon trade, and pirate attacks brought about a further decline. Until recently, Huatulco and other small villages along this stretch of coast remained forgotten outposts.

Jagged boulders and small islands characterize this section of Mexico's Pacific coastline, much of which is backed by dense tropical forest. The resort area comprises nine bays in all. Thanks to their natural layout, large-scale development will be broken into a series of resort areas targeting budget, mid-range and upper-end travelers. Ecotourism is promoted heavily, and there are increasing opportunities for jungle hikes, river rafting, rappelling and other vigorous activities.

#### **Practicalities**

Huatulco International Airport is off Mex. 200, about 19 kilometers (12 miles) northwest of the Tangolunda resort area. United offers direct flights from the United States. Other airlines providing service to the airport include Aeroméxico, American Airlines and Volaris. The two terminals—one for international flights, one for domestic flights—are large, palapa-style hardwood structures with high ceilings and thatched roofs. Arriving visitors will in all likelihood encounter roaming time share representatives; be prepared to avoid their high-pressure sales pitches. For additional information about airlines see Arriving by Air, page p. 28.

Transportes Terrestres, phone (958) 581-9014, operates shared minivan (colectivo) service that shuttles passengers from the airport to the resort hotels; expect to pay about \$21 (U.S.) per person. A private taxi (often a Chevrolet Suburban) is much more expensive—about \$50 and up, depending on the amount of luggage you have—and drivers can be aggressive about soliciting fares.

Taxi service also links the three separate areas of Tangolunda, Santa Cruz and La Crucecita. Cabs wait in front of the big hotels and also congregate around the plazas in Santa Cruz and La Crucecita. Fares average about \$6 (U.S.) from La Crucecita to Tangolunda and \$3

from Santa Cruz to Tangolunda or Santa Cruz to La Crucecita. Rates are posted at the travel booth on the main plaza in La Crucecita.

Since Huatulco is spread out and also has a good road network, a rental car can come in handy for exploring as well as for trips to nearby destinations. AAA members can reserve a rental car through their local club; it is recommended that you make all necessary arrangements prior to your departure. It also helps to know the peso equivalent of the dollar rate you are charged, since the charge in Mexico will be in pesos.

The climate is tropical, with an average annual temperature of 82 degrees. Temperatures in May, the hottest month, can reach 100. January through May is practically rainless; heavy rains fall July through September. As in Mexico's other Pacific coast resorts, the "winter" months, December through March, are the sunniest, driest and least oppressive. **Note:** Mosquitoes can be fierce all along the coast. Pack an effective insect repellent or pick up Autan Classic, a widely available Mexican brand.

#### **Beaches and Recreation**

From east to west, the nine bays of Huatulco are Conejos, Tangolunda, Chahué, Santa Cruz, El Organo, El Maguey, Cacaluta, Chachacual and San Agustín. Conejos, Tangolunda, Chahue, Santa Cruz, El Maguey and El Organo are accessible by car; others can be reached only by boat. Bahía Conejos has minimal tourist facilities but offers excellent snorkeling, diving and fishing at its four beaches.

Luxury hotel development in Huatulco is focused along Bahía Tangolunda, which means "place where the gods live" in the Zapotec dialect. High-rise buildings are absent—no structure here is more than six stories tall. As a result, the Mediterranean-, Moorish- and Mexican-style resorts that hug the bay offer unobstructed views from many different vantage points. Careful attention has been given to paving and landscaping, with sculptured rocks separating the roads running to and from the resort properties.

Several beaches line this bay, including Playa La Hierbabuena, Playa del Amor (Love Beach), Punta Paraiso and Playa La Entrega, where a coral reef lies just a few feet offshore. Most of the resorts are all-inclusive, with shuttle service to the beach and such diversions as themed evening shows and Mexican Fiesta nights.

Bahía Chahué (Chah-WAY) is the largest of the nine, with three separate stretches of sandy beach and a marina catering to private yachts. Many hotel employees live in La Crucecita, a planned town and residential area a mile or so inland off Mex. 200. Its main square, while not particularly authentic, is attractive, graced with a central bandstand, brick walkways, green lawns, shade trees and white stone benches.

Surrounding this plaza are modest hotels, restaurants and shops specializing in Oaxacan handicrafts. The area is lively in the evening, when locals and tourists mingle at the restaurants and in the square.

Bahía Santa Cruz is the site of the original fishing settlement of Huatulco. Day cruises to the other eight bays depart from the marina here; arrangements can be made at your hotel or through local travel agents.

The village of Santa Cruz has a shady main square surrounded by shops, restaurants, bars and a few Mexicanstyle, middle-class hotels. Playa Santa Cruz, the main beach, is a short distance from the marina. It has clear, calm water and refreshment facilities, making it a pleasant spot to snorkel or simply lay around after lunch. Nearby Playa Yerbabuena and Playa La Entrega are accessible by boat, either an outboard motor-propelled *panga* (skiff) or a deluxe cruise vessel.

Bahía El Organo has gentle surf, nearby parking facilities and a few open-air *palapa* restaurants. The four westernmost bays—El Maguey, Cacaluta, Chachacual and San Agustín—were designated a national park in 1998, protecting them from commercial development, although they can still be visited. Cacaluta and Chachacual have long, deserted stretches of beach; San Agustín is excellent for diving. All of the beaches boast lovely golden sand and pristine water, the result of a sewage system that permits nothing to be dumped into the ocean.

In the mountains above Huatulco are coffee plantations begun by German immigrants. The tropical highlands in the vicinity offer ideal conditions for growing coffee, an evergreen shrub native to East Africa.

The best way to enjoy the cove-pocked coastline is to take a cruise. Boat tours visit El Maguey and Chachacual bays, with time for swimming or snorkeling and lunch on the beach. Guided kayaking trips explore the Copalita River, which winds into the nearby mountains.

Isla La Blanquita, off Bahía Santa Cruz, looks white from a distance, crowded as it is with seagulls, ducks, pelicans and albatrosses. Bahía El Organo's U-shaped Playa Violín has very fine sand and gentle waves not unlike a natural swimming pool. El Bufadero, a blowhole in a shoreline cliff, occasionally spouts jets of water; the aptly named Stone Face is a rock formation just above the water.

Surf conditions can fluctuate greatly at Tangolunda Bay; heed the colored flags posted along the beach that advertise swimming conditions. Tangolunda and Santa Cruz bays have the most extensive equipment rental facilities. Among the prettiest beaches are Bahía Chahué's Playa Esperanza and Playa Tejón, and Bahía Chachacual's Playa la India. Swimming is best at Conejos, Tangolunda, Santa Cruz, El Organo and El Maguey bays.

The easiest way to arrange most activities is through a travel agency. Bahías Plus has offices in the major hotels and offers various tours, including snorkeling, diving and sport-fishing trips, sunset cruises, bird-watching excursions, ATV jungle adventures, wildlife observation ecotours, and day trips to Puerto Angel and Zipolite Beach. The all-purpose "Huatulco Discovery" sightseeing tour includes a swim at El Maguey Bay, a stop in downtown La Crucecita and time out for shopping.

If necessary, bring comfortable shoes, sunblock, insect repellent and/or a bathing suit or change of clothes. Expect to get dusty riding in an ATV. Some excursions are advised only for those in good physical condition. Bahía Plus agency's main office is at Av. Carrizal #704 in La Crucecita; phone (958) 587-0216.

## **Dining and Nightlife**

Dining choices in Huatulco are not necessarily limited to the expensive hotel restaurants. Restaurant Ve El Mar, on the water's edge at Playa Santa Cruz, is a casual, friendly place serving lobster, ceviche, shrimp and other seafood dishes.

Airy, colorfully decorated El Sabor de Oaxaca, Avenida Guamúchil #206 in La Crucecita (just east of the plaza, in the Hotel Las Palmas), features such regional fare as chicken in *mole* sauce, *tlayudas* (big corn tortillas with cheese and other toppings), *chiles rellenos* (stuffed chiles) and tamales. Café Huatulco is on the plaza in Santa Cruz (near the marina). It serves a variety of caffeinated concoctions utilizing good locally grown coffee, and also sells whole beans.

As far as nightlife goes, most of the hotels have their own bars, and the bigger ones stage Mexican Fiesta nights. **Note:** Finding a cab late at night can be difficult. Make any necessary arrangements for transportation back to your hotel before stepping out for the evening.

One local hangout that has been around awhile is the La Crema Bar, Calle Gardenia #311 (on the main plaza in La Crucecita, across from the Hotel La Flamboyant). You can't miss the guitar-playing dude hanging from the outside of the building. The inside is colorful and kitschy, with a bar serving everything from *cervezas* to tequila shots. Loud rock and occasional live bands draw a young crowd, but the festive atmosphere is fun for all ages, and the bar is a good place to mingle with locals.

Huatulco Hotel and Motel Association: (Asociación de Hoteles y Moteles de Huatulco) office is at Blvd. Benito Juárez #8 (in Park Royal Beach Hutaulco hotel). The staff can provide information about a variety of local excursions, including day trips to Puerto Escondido and Puerto Angel. The office is open Mon.-Fri. 9-5, Sat. 9-2. Phone: (958) 581-0486 or (866) 416-0555.

## **Nearby Destinations**

Northwest of the airport off Mex. 200, sitting at the foot of the jungle-carpeted Sierra Madre del Sur, is Santa María Huatulco, which functioned as a trade center for the coastal region during pre-Hispanic times. Today the town serves as the governmental center for the different districts that make up Huatulco. It is about 10 kilometers (6 miles) from the airport and west of the developed bays: watch for the marked turn-off on Mex. 200.

Unlike the resort area, Santa María Huatulco has the look of a typical Mexican small town. Activity centers on the main square, where there is a museum housing an interesting collection of masks. Also on the square is the 18th-century, red-and-white cathedral; inside is a fragment of wood that is said to be part of Jesus' cross.

A day trip can be made to the coastal town of Puerto Angel, about 49 kilometers (30 miles) west of Huatulco via Mex. 200 to the town of Pochutla, then about 12 kilometers (7 miles) south on the Puerto Angel-San Antonio highway. Buses travel from Huatulco to Pochutla, from which a taxi can be taken to Puerto Angel. This small fishing village was rebuilt after being severely damaged by Hurricane Pauline in 1997. The beaches are rocky but pretty, and the bay is dotted with pangas-small, motorpropelled skiffs.

Morning activity centers around Playa Principal and the town pier, where fishing boats arrive with the day's catch. The most popular in-town swimming and sunning beach is Playa Panteón, where there are sandy-floored palapa eateries and an oceanfront graveyard filled with colorful tombstones.

Playa Zipolite, about 5 kilometers (3 miles) west of Puerto Angel toward Mazunte, is one of the few beaches in Mexico where nudity is tolerated. In addition to au naturel sunbathers (who congregate at one end of the beach), Zipolite attracts a young crowd of surfers and backpackers. Strung along the sand are huts where one can eat, drink or just lounge in a hammock. Camping is permitted at the beach's trailer park. If you do venture here, don't bring anything valuable, as petty theft is common, and avoid walking on the beach after dark. The undertow is treacherous, so swimming is not advised.



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## COLIMA, COLIMA

Travel Advisory: We do not recommend travel to the state of Colima due to the U.S. Department of State's "Do Not Travel" warning. The acute level of crime and violence in this area prohibits AAA inspections.

Although the city of Colima (koh-LEE-mah) is little visited, it makes a very pleasant day trip from Manzanillo and a nice break from the beach. The 70-minute drive—via the Manzanillo-Colima toll highway to the town of Tecomán, then north on Mex. 110—passes beautiful tropical and mountain scenery. If you don't have a car, trips to Colima can be arranged through travel agencies at Manzanillo resorts (see What To Do under the Manzanillo listing). The toll fee is about \$6.75 (U.S.); have pesos on hand to pay the charge.

Colima itself lies in a fertile valley. Although tropical in appearance, it is cooler than the lowlands along the coast. The Río Colima divides the city in two, running through tropical fruit orchards and clusters of coconut palms (the region is an important producer of coconuts, bananas and lemons). Entering the city via Mex. 110 from Manzanillo, the first landmark visitors see is the King Colima Monument, a sculpture erected in 1955.

What makes Colima especially enticing—besides the notable cleanliness of its streets and parks—is the carefully preserved colonial atmosphere of the town center. Many of the downtown buildings were constructed in the neoclassic style during the later years of dictator Porfirio Díaz's regime. Earthquakes in 1932 and 1944 leveled some of the structures, which were later rebuilt.

Jardín Libertad, the main plaza, is located between avenidas Francisco I. Madero, Miguel Hidalgo, Santos Degollado and Reforma. The plaza, landscaped with palm trees and tropical shrubs, has walkways lined with white wrought-iron benches and fountains shooting streams of water. A domed gazebo stands at its center. Beneath arcades on the north and south sides of the plaza are shops and commercial businesses.

The Government Palace (see attraction listing) is on the plaza's east side. Bordering the west side is the cathedral (Catedral Basilica Menor de Colima), built by the Spanish in 1527 and subsequently rebuilt several times. The Hidalgo Theater (Teatro Hidalgo), a block southwest of Plaza Principal at the corner of Degollado and Independencia, was completed in 1883 and reconstructed after earthquakes in 1932 and again in 1941. The opulent interior has a 19th-century elegance. For theater schedule and ticket information phone (312) 312-1231.

Four blocks east of the main plaza between avenidas Benito Juárez and Revolución is Jardín Nuñez, a park with lush greenery that makes it a good spot for relaxing. For lunch try Samadhi, about 2 blocks north of Jardín Nuñez on Avenida Filomena Medina (where it branches off Avenida Juárez). This vegetarian restaurant has a shady courtyard and serves a tasty, inexpensive comida corrida. Have a licuado (fruit shake) or juice rather than taking a chance on the water.

Just south of the House of Culture complex (see attraction listing), on the east side of Calzada Pedro Galván, is Piedra Lisa Park (Parque La Piedra Lisa). The name means "sliding stone," and those who do slide on the namesake rock will supposedly return to Colima one day.

The Main Bus Terminal (Central Camionera Foránea), also called Terminal Nuevo, is a little over a mile east of the city center via Avenida Guerrero to Avenida Niños Heroes.

About 7 kilometers (4 miles) north of Colima (via Avenida Herrera out of town) is the village of Comala ("the place of the griddles"). It's a quick trip by car or bus; "suburban" buses leave from the Central Camionera Suburbana station at Plaza Colimán, on the western outskirts of town via Carretera a Coquimatlán.

Comala was once known as El Pueblo Blanco ("The White Town") for its white buildings (although with redtiled roofs). Passing time in the central plaza, with its benches and shade trees, makes for a pleasant afternoon outing. A group of small restaurants on the plaza's south side serve a variety of botanas, or appetizers, for the price of potent Mexican libations. As the afternoon lingers on, the square fills with the sound of music as mariachi bands try to outdo each other for customers' business.

The Sociedad Artesanías Cooperativa Pueblo Blanco, a short walk south from the Comala town center, is a factory



and crafts school. Local artisans create colonial-style wood furniture and ironwork using traditional methods, and good buys are possible.

Twin volcanoes just 3 miles apart are the focus of Volcán Nevado de Colima National Park, about 40 kilometers (25 miles) north of the city via Highway 16 (the road to the villages of Comala, Suchitlán and San Francisco). Dormant Volcán Nevado de Colima, 14,365 feet tall, has flanks cloaked with forests of conifers.

Neighboring Volcán de Fuego, 12,989 feet tall, on the other hand, has acted up numerous times since a disastrous eruption in 1941. The most recent major outburst occurred in June 2018, spewing rocks and lava, necessitating the evacuation of nearby villages and creating spectacular night scenes for intrepid photographers.

From May through July orchids line the paved, winding road to the tiny village of San Antonio, just outside the national park. The clear, dry winter months, when the volcanoes are snowcapped, is the best time for viewing them. Experienced mountaineers often hike or climb to the summit of Nevado de Colima.

Colima State Tourism Office (Secretaría de Turismo): is inside the Government Palace building on the west side of the main plaza. Open Mon.-Fri. 8:30-4:30. Phone: (312) 316-2000.

GOVERNMENT PALACE (Palacio de Gobierno) is on the w. side of the main plaza. Built between 1884 and 1904, it has a cool inner courtyard. Covering four walls around an interior staircase is a mural by Jorge Chavez Carrillo illustrating scenes from Mexican history, beginning with the Spanish conquest and ending with the 1910 Revolution.

LA CAMPANA RUINS are on the city's n.w. edge in the village of Villa de Alvarez, next to the Technological Center on Av. Tecnológico, following signs. The earliest remains of this important pre-Hispanic settlement are believed to date from around 1500 B.C. Seven pyramid-like buildings and a tomb have been excavated; structures No. 5 and 6 are the largest, and Structure No. 7 has a tunnel tomb beneath it. Buses run from downtown Colima to the site.

Background information is presented in Spanish and English. **Time:** Allow 30 minutes minimum. **Phone:** (312) 313-4946.

# COSTALEGRE, JALISCO

Note: For current information about safety/security issues in Costalegre, refer to the U.S. State Department website (travel.state.gov).

The Costalegre (Happy Coast)—also known as the Costa Careyes, or Turtle Coast—extends from Chamela south to Barra de Navidad. A few expensive, exclusive, secluded resorts catering to the wealthy are tucked among a string of modest beach towns that are popular weekend getaways for residents of Guadalajara.

By car, take Mex. 200 south from Puerto Vallarta. (Buses traveling between Puerto Vallarta and Manzanillo also make stops along the coast.) At Boca de Tomatlán, south of Puerto Vallarta, the road swings inland, bypassing Cabo Corrientes (the southern tip of Banderas Bay) before nearing the Pacific again in the vicinity of Chamela. Although not strictly a coastal route, the highway does offer occasional views of the ocean.

The scenery is varied—hills spiked with cactus give way to palm groves as the route winds south, and views shift from craggy mountains to waterfowl-filled lagoons. Many of the villages, beaches and private resorts along the Costa Alegre are accessed from dirt roads branching off Mex. 200.

The village of Chamela sits on bluffs overlooking Bahía Chamela. First settled in 1525, it served as a fortified anchoring ground for Spanish galleons returning from the Orient. Sea turtles inhabit the local beaches. During February and March, huge flocks of migrating sea birds settle on the small islands in the bay. A few rustic bungalows, restaurants and campsites accommodate travelers.

The next major development is Costa Careyes, where an all-inclusive resort development and luxury villas are situated along a series of rocky, jungle-edged coves protected from the open ocean. Further south is the tranquil, mile-long beach at Tenacatita, which is reached by a 8-kilometer (5-mile) dirt road turn-off. There are a number of restaurants at the western end of the beach.

The most popular stretch of the Costalegre is anchored by the towns of Barra de Navidad and San Patricio Melaque (meh-LAH-keh), just north of the Colima state border. They lie about 2 miles apart along the shore of crescent-shaped Bahía de Navidad, which is edged by a long, curving beach. Small, inexpensive hotels and thatch-roofed restaurants line the beach, known for its blazing sunsets. This area is much less crowded during the week than it is on weekends (and particularly during the Easter and Christmas holidays).

Barra de Navidad, on a sandbar lying between the bay and a lagoon, is the more picturesque of the two towns and the one most dependent on tourism. While not luxurious, it has more upscale accommodations than San Patricio Melaque. Hotels line Avenida Lopez de Legazpi, the beachfront street (although it is actually a short walk to the beach from most of them).

The redbrick-tiled *Zócalo*, on Calle Jalisco, is part of a pedestrian mall closed to traffic. This plaza is the place to relax, browse the many small shops *(tiendas)*, have a cup of coffee or a cold *cerveza*, or perhaps have your hair braided by one of the local women. A street market sets up along Calle Guanajuato between avenidas Veracruz and Tampico on Thursdays.

There are views of the bay and beaches along the length of the *malecón* (sea wall), where *pangas* (small open-air ferries) and yachts can be seen entering and leaving the harbor. On the ocean side of the *malecón* stands "Triton & Nereida." The sculpture commemorates the 400th anniversary of the discovery of the Philippine islands by a Spanish expedition that departed from this area in 1554.

The panga docks are at the south end of Avenida Veracruz, on the lagoon side of the sandbar. The local cooperativa—an association of individual boat operators—is further up the street. They can arrange fishing excursions, a tour of the lagoon or a quick trip across it to one of the half-dozen seafood restaurants in the little village of Colimilla. Lagoon tours are around 220 pesos.

Local buses connect Barra de Navidad with San Patricio Melaque, toward the northern end of Bahía de Navidad. Melaque, with its main plaza, church, municipal market and bus station, is more like a typical Mexican town, and has a greater number of hotels in the budget range.

# **IXTAPA, GUERRERO**

Travel Advisory: We do not recommend travel to the state of Guerrero due to the U.S. Department of State's "Do Not Travel" warning. The acute level of crime and violence in this area prohibits AAA inspections.

Ixtapa (eeks-TAH-pa) and Zihuatanejo (see-wah-tah-NEH-ho) are geographically close resorts on Guerrero's Pacific coast, but they are altogether different in character. Ixtapa materialized in the 1970s, largely through the efforts of FONATUR, the Mexican government's tourism development agency. Zihuatanejo, in contrast, was a quaint little fishing town long before its northern neighbor's first lofty hotel rose from the sand. While Ixtapa indulges visitors with luxurious amenities at world-class hotels, Zihuatanejo beguiles them with centuries-old traditions and—despite its own increased growth—a relaxed village feel.

Like Cancún, Ixtapa appeals to the traveler who craves a getaway from daily concerns. Beauty and pampering come with a price, of course, but for those willing to pay it, the big-league resort trappings definitely satisfy. With Ixtapa's air-conditioned luxury and Zihuatanejo's down-to-earth informality, vacationers have the best of both worlds.

### **Practicalities**

Ixtapa-Zihuatanejo International Airport is off Mex. 200 (referred to as the Carretera Costera, or Coastal Highway), about 10 kilometers (6 miles) east of Zihuatanejo and 17 kilometers (10.5 miles) southeast of Ixtapa. Alaska, American, Delta and United airlines fly direct from the United States. Other airlines offering service to Ixtapa/Zihuatanejo include Aeroméxico and Volaris. For additional information about airlines see Arriving by Air, page p. 28.

Fixed-price *colectivos* (minivans) shuttle groups of passengers from the airport to hotels in either Ixtapa or Zihuatanejo. Tickets are purchased at the transportation desk in the arrival area. It will cost slightly more for a ride to Ixtapa. Private taxis from the airport are more than twice as expensive. Arrange transportation back to the airport through your hotel.

Taxis are a convenient way to shuttle between Zihuatanejo and Ixtapa's Hotel Zone (about a 10-minute ride), but they're expensive. It costs at least \$7 (U.S.) to travel between the two, and fares average about \$4 within each town. Rates go up after midnight. Current rates are posted in hotel lobbies. Fortunately, both the Hotel Zone and downtown Zihuatanejo are easily negotiated on foot. Regardless of where you're going, agree to a fare before getting in the cab.

City buses run frequently between Ixtapa and Zihuatanejo. The fare is inexpensive, about \$1 (U.S.) one way. Buses make numerous stops along Boulevard Ixtapa; in Zihuatanejo, they stop near the intersection of avenidas Morelos and Benito Juárez, some 3 blocks north of the city market.

Currency can be exchanged at banks and casas de cambio (exchange houses). Banks usually have the best rates and are open Mon.-Fri. 9-1. A Banamex branch is at the corner of Ejido and Vicente Guerrero in downtown Zihuatanejo. In Ixtapa, there are 24-hour Banamex automatic teller (cajero automático) machines on Boulevard Ixtapa next to the Hotel Fontan and at other locations. In Zihuatanejo, there are ATMs at Ejido and Vicente Guerrero and on Benito Juárez in the Comercial Mexicana, as well as several other locations. The machines accept Mastercard or Visa and dispense pesos.

For assistance or in case of an emergency, contact the Ixtapa municipal police; phone (755) 554-2040. The Red Cross (Cruz Roja), in Zihuatanejo on Avenida Mar de Java, provides 24-hour ambulance service; phone 911 or (755)

554-2009. Major hotels should be able to provide the names and phone numbers of English-speaking doctors.

The average annual temperature at this tropical location is a balmy 79 degrees. Summers are hot, with temperatures ranging from the upper 70s to the low 90s. The winter months—high tourist season—are slightly cooler, with lows in the low 70s, highs in the upper 80s. The rainy season, from June through October, turns the normally brown countryside a brilliant green. The rain frequently falls at night, guaranteeing sunny days almost all year. Pacific hurricanes occasionally strike this section of the coast.

## Layout

An impressive string of high-rise hotels, surrounded by clusters of palms, make up Ixtapa's Hotel Zone, which fronts broad Palmar Bay. Boulevard Ixtapa is the main street and runs behind the hotels. On the other side of this thoroughfare are a number of small shopping malls. At the Hotel Zone's eastern end is the Ixtapa Golf Club. Almost anything of interest to visitors will be on either side of Boulevard Ixtapa.

About a mile before the end of the Hotel Zone (if you're heading north), a road branching to the right off Boulevard Ixtapa leads to Mex. 200, and also is the way to get to Playa Quieta, Playa Linda and other beaches north of Ixtapa proper (watch for signs indicating the destination). Boulevard Ixtapa itself ends in a traffic circle at the 450acre Marina Ixtapa complex, where luxury villas and condominiums share space with a 622-slip yacht marina, the Marina Golf Course and a dockside promenade lined with restaurants. Overlooking the marina is El Faro, an 85foot-tall tower that offers a 360-degree view of the surrounding area.

Ixtapa is connected with Zihuatanejo, about 7 kilometers (4 miles) to the southeast, by Mex. 200, which is referred to as the carretera. Zihuatanejo, or "Zihua," spreads along the shores of oyster-shaped Bahía de Zihuatanejo, a naturally protected harbor. Less than 2 miles wide, this is one of the more picturesque bays along Mexico's Pacific coast.

Zihuatanejo's small downtown lies north of the bay; to the east are unobstructed beaches and the foothills of the Sierra Madre del Sur. Locals and tourists alike congregate along the *malecón* (waterfront promenade), officially called Paseo del Pescador. In Zihuatanejo, the basketball court fronting the beach right in the center of town takes the place of the traditional Mexican main square.

East-west Avenida Juan Alvarez, a block north of and paralleling the *malecón*, is one of the main traffic arteries; it takes traffic out of the commercial area while Avenida Eiido, a block farther inland, takes traffic in. The main north-south thoroughfares are 5 de Mayo, Cuauhtémoc

(which is pedestrian-only for a couple of blocks), Vicente Guerrero and Benito Juárez.

Hotels perch atop the cliffs surrounding the bay. A clifftop *mirador* (lookout point) along Camino a Playa la Ropa, the road that connects Zihuatanejo and La Ropa Beach, offers a spectacular view of the town and the bay. A bronze plague (in Spanish) commemorates the first commercial maritime expedition that departed from the port, bound for the Philippines.

#### The Beaches

The coastline between Ixtapa/Zihuatanejo and Acapulco is known as "La Costa Grande" because of its broad, open beaches. The swath fronting the Ixtapa Hotel Zone is called Playa el Palmar. The dramatic arc of white sand forms a wide curve, with clusters of rock formations rising from the offshore waters. This beach faces the ocean, and the surf is rough at times. At the eastern end of the Hotel Zone, near the Ixtapa Golf Club, is Playa Vista Hermosa. Between Ixtapa and Zihuatanejo is secluded Playa Majahua.

Outboard motor-powered skiffs (pangas) depart from the small jetty at Playa Linda, several miles up the coast, for the 10-minute boat ride to Isla Ixtapa, a short distance offshore. This is a pleasant place to spend a day sunning, snorkeling or diving; basic snorkeling gear is available for rent. Playa Cuachalalate, the main beach, is lined with palapa restaurants.

Round-trip tickets for the boat ride to Isla Ixtapa can be purchased at the Playa Linda pier landing for around 50 pesos. The last boats depart back to the mainland around 5 p.m.; keep your ticket stub for the return trip. It's recommended to take a boat displaying the local Cooperativa emblem.

Zihuatanejo's main beach is Playa Principal, a sandy stretch in front of the malecón (Paseo del Pescador). At the malecón's western end is the town pier (muelle). Local fishermen store their boats and gear on the sand after returning with the morning's catch. At the western end of the malecón, a concrete bridge crosses a narrow canal; to the south is the Puerto Mío resort and marina.

Just east of Playa Principal and the main part of town is Playa la Madera (Wood Beach). The name is a reference to the time when wood cut from mountain forests was shipped back to Spain. Small hotels, private bungalows and restaurants crowd Cerro la Madera (Madera Hill), which rises behind the narrow beach. A bayside footpath (known as "Continuación del Paseo del Pescador") cuts through the rocks and is a pleasant walk if not attempted at high tide, when you're bound to get wet. Also avoid the footpath after dark.

Particularly pretty is Playa la Ropa (Clothes Beach), on the protected eastern side of the bay and a 5-minute taxi ride from downtown Zihuatanejo. The name refers to the cargo of silks that were strewn all over the beach when a Spanish galleon shipwrecked here. Palm trees fringe the mile of soft white sand, and several sand-floored, thatchroofed eateries offer both seafood and Mexican cooking. Playa la Ropa is good for swimming, water skiing, jet skiing, parasailing and windsurfing. A steep rock bluff separates this beach from Playa la Madera.

Divers and snorkelers head for the crystalline waters of Playa las Gatas, which is reached by boat. Harmless nurse sharks once populated the shallow, rocky bay bottom, hence the name. There are a number of open-air restaurants here. Small, canopied pangas depart from Zihuatanejo's town pier for the scenic 10-minute ride across the bay to the small dock at Las Gatas. Round-trip tickets cost around 50 pesos and can be purchased at the Cooperativa office at the head of the pier. These "water taxis" run frequently; keep your ticket stub for the return trip.

#### Outdoor Recreation

Sailfish is the pre-eminent big-game catch in these offshore waters, along with blue and black marlin, dorado (mahi-mahi) and yellowfin tuna; smaller species like barracuda, grouper, roosterfish, Spanish mackerel and wahoo also put up a spirited fight. An environmentally friendly tag-and-release policy is promoted.

The Boat Cooperative (Cooperativa de Lanchas de Recreo) at the Zihuatanejo town pier can arrange an excursion. Prices vary based on the size of the boat and the number of people and can be negotiated with the boat owners. Most of the boats depart the bay by 7 a.m. and return around 3. Your hotel may be able to arrange a fishing trip, although it will cost more.

Ixtapa Aqua Paradise arranges local scuba trips. Visibility is best from May through December, although diving is possible year-round. Scuba sites range from shallow reefs to submerged shipwrecks to canyons 100 feet below the surface. Night dives and certification courses also are available. The dive center is located in the hotel Barceló Ixtapa Beach at the south end of the hotel zone. For information and reservations phone (755) 555-2078.

Yates del Sol's trimaran *Picante* departs from Zihuatanejo Bay for a 4.5-hour sailing and snorkeling cruise to Playa Manzanillo, accessible only by boat. The trip includes lunch; snorkeling gear is available for rent. A 2.5hour "magical sunset" cruise sails from the bay into the open Pacific for sunset watching, a view of Ixtapa's Hotel Zone and onboard hors d'oeuvres. Both cruises include an open bar and transportation from Ixtapa hotels. Reservations are required. Cruises can be arranged through a

local travel agency, or phone Yates del Sol at (755) 554-2694 or (755) 554-8270.

Water and jet skiing, windsurfing and parasailing can be enjoyed at both Ixtapa and Zihuatanejo. Facilities and equipment rentals are usually available at Playa del Palmar, Playa la Ropa and Playa las Gatas. Surfers favor Playa Troncones, which faces the open ocean northwest of Ixtapa. Note: Make certain that parasailing is arranged only through a reputable outfit. Not all boat operators have the required level of experience, and accidents have occurred.

The Ixtapa Golf Club (Campo de Golf Ixtapa), at the eastern end of the Hotel Zone, extends to the ocean's edge. The grounds, lush with tropical vegetation, are considered a wildlife preserve and are home to numerous exotic birds. Crocodiles inhabit some of the water hazards, discouraging any attempts to search for balls lost in the drink; zoologists from Mexico City visit once a year and retrieve the largest specimens for relocation to Mexican zoos. Clubhouse facilities include a pro shop, restaurant and pool with a lounge deck. For reservations information phone (755) 553-1062.

Tennis courts are located at the Ixtapa Golf Club, the clubhouse at Marina Ixtapa, at the major Ixtapa hotels, and at the Thompson Zihuatanejo hotel at Playa la Ropa in Zihuatanejo. Most courts are illuminated for night play; nonquests can usually play at the hotel courts for a fee.

Go horseback riding along Playa Linda or Playa Larga, both northwest of Ixtapa's Hotel Zone, or through one of the nearby coconut plantations. Sunset rides are especially nice, although you'll need to apply insect repellent. Reservations can be made through a local travel agency or by contacting Rancho Playa Linda; phone (755) 554-3085 (Spanish only spoken).

A crocodile farm (cocodrilario) at Playa Linda provides the opportunity to observe these armor-plated reptiles in a jungle estuary habitat from the safety of an elevated boardwalk. A bike is the best way to explore Aztlán Ecological Park, near the Marina Ixtapa complex, a wildlife sanctuary inhabited by iguanas, turtles and various bird species.

# Shopping

There are no malls in the traditionally sprawling sense in either Ixtapa or Zihuatanejo. Instead, small complexes with (usually) air-conditioned shops line Boulevard Ixtapa, across the street from the big hotels. Fashionable resort wear, sportswear, jewelry, art and handicrafts fill the boutiques at Ixpamar, La Puerta, Las Fuentes and Los Patios, among other shopping plazas.

La Fuente, in the Los Patios shopping center, has a fine selection of talavera pottery, hand-blown glass, ceramics and papier-mâché figures. Mic Mac, in the La Puerta center, offers native handicrafts, embroidered clothing and wall hangings. All of the shopping centers contain restaurants and snack shops for those in need of refueling. Most of the stores are open daily; many of them close from 2-4.

Downtown Zihuatanejo has its share of souvenir stands and T-shirt emporiums, but it's also a good place to search out Mexican handicrafts. Shops and stalls line Paseo del Pescador and the adjacent streets. Mario's Leather Shop, Calle Vicente Guerrero #12, features custom-made saddles, hats, vests, purses and belts. Galería Maya, Av. Nicolas Bravo #31, and Arte Mexicano Nopal, just inland from the waterfront at Av. Cinco de Mayo #56, display such items as pewter frames, straw baskets, wooden sculptures, handmade leather bags and gift items.

Casa Marina, Paseo del Pescador #9 (near the main plaza), houses small, family-owned folk art and handicraft shops under one roof. There are displays of pottery, rugs, pillows, regional costumes, silver jewelry, hammocks, hand-painted lacquer boxes and masks created by Guerrero artisans. Within the complex is Café la Marina, where you can have a pizza and a beer and then browse through the large collection of used books for sale and trade.

Vendors hawk their wares at specially designated handicrafts markets. At the Mercado de Artesanía Turístico, on Boulevard Ixtapa across from the Hotel Barcelo, there are numerous souvenir and handicraft stands. In Zihuatanejo, a similar tourist-oriented market is located along Calle 5 de Mayo across from the church. Families operate many of the stalls at these markets, producing hand-painted ceramics, seashell knickknacks and embroidered goods.

# Dining, Nightlife and Events

For an expensive but reliably good dining experience, the Ixtapa Hotel Zone is an obvious choice. Zihuatanejo has a lower price range and a greater variety of eateries; imported fast-food chains are conspicuously absent. Fresh seafood—lobster, clams, squid, huachinango (red snapper) and a local specialty, camarones al ajo (garlic shrimp)—are on many Zihuatanejo menus.

La Sirena Gorda (The Fat Mermaid), on the *malecón* next to the town pier, is known for its fresh seafood tacos—fish, shrimp, octopus and conch—and also is a pleasant spot for breakfast. Nueva Zelanda, Calle Cuauhtémoc #23 (at Avenida Ejido), is casual and familyoriented, specializing in tortas (sandwiches), enchiladas and *licuados* (fruit shakes). There is a branch in Ixtapa as well (in the Los Patios shopping center).

Pozole is a hearty, hominy-thickened soup with a chicken or pork stock base. Toppings include avocado slices, chopped onion, white cheese, lettuce and cabbage; herbs and spices vary depending on who is making the pozole. Less adventurous diners will appreciate the fact that pickled pig knuckles are normally served on the

side. The addition of chile peppers gives *pozole* three different colors—red, green or white. Thursday is the traditional day to eat this thoroughly Mexican dish, and most lunch spots in Zihuatanejo include it on their Thursday comida corrida menu.

Mexican "Fiesta Nights" are popular evening entertainment in Ixtapa during peak tourist season (December to March). They start around 7 p.m. with a lavish buffet spread, after which live music and folkloric dance performances are presented. The cost, about \$35-\$45 (U.S.) per person, normally includes dinner, drinks and the show. The Las Brisas Ixtapa and the Krystal hotel in Ixtapa both offer occasional fiestas in high season. Ixtapa's Sunscape Dorado Pacifico resort hosts a fiesta once a week in high season. The Barcelo Ixtapa Beach hotel presents entertainment year-round. Reservations or advance tickets are necessary; call the hotel or make arrangements through a local travel agency.

Casual is the standard attire in both Ixtapa and Zihuatanejo, although you'll want to dress up a little for an evening out at an expensive restaurant or fashionable nightspot. Most restaurants use purified water to make the ice in drinks (check to see if the cubes have holes). If in doubt, order bottled mineral water (the brands Agua de Taxco or Tehuacán are good), beer or a soft drink; the *limón* flavor of Yoli, a soft-drink brand sold only in the state of Guerrero. is similar to 7-Up. See the Lodgings & Restaurants section for AAA Diamond designated dining establishments.

Nightlife is concentrated in Ixtapa. Christine, in the Krystal hotel, has a laser light show set to music beginning at midnight; after that dancing takes over. Tiers of tables overlook the dance floor. The club is open only on Fridays and Saturdays during the spring tourist high season. The doors open around 10:30 p.m., and there's a cover charge. Shorts, jeans and tennis shoes are not permitted.

In February, the Zihuatanejo Sailfest features boat races and the requisite hoopla. The International Sailfish Tournament draws hardcore sports fishermen in May. Other sporting events include a national triathlon in Ixtapa in late May. Check with the convention and visitors bureau for specific dates, which tend to be erratic.

Cultural Sunday takes place every Sunday at the basketball court in downtown Zihuatanejo. Young children are in the spotlight at this delightful event, performing regional dances from all over Mexico in full, colorful costume. The festivities begin around 6 p.m.

Convention & Visitors Bureau: in Ixtapa in the Plaza Zócalo building, behind the Plaza La Puerta shopping center on Boulevard Ixtapa. Open Mon.-Fri. 9-2 and 4-7. Avoid booths with "Tourist Information" signs (found

mostly at the airport), which are essentially pushing timeshared properties. **Phone:** (755) 553-1270.

**DELFINITI IXTAPA** is at the n. end of the Hotel Zone, adjacent to the Posada Real Ixtapa hotel; from Blvd. Ixtapa, follow the driveway to the hotel and Dolphinarium. Three different encounters are offered. Visitors can stand on a submerged platform for an underwater observation, pet dolphins as they swim in front of you, or swim with them by holding onto their fins. There also is a dolphin encounter for children.

Before the dolphin encounter begins you can have your picture taken with colorful parrots. Guests are accompanied to an area with lockers and seating, and a brief instructional program about dolphin interaction is given. Photos are taken throughout the program and are available for purchase.

Dolphin encounters can be reserved by phone or booked through your hotel; a major credit card is required to hold a reservation. Programs are offered in English and Spanish. Children must be accompanied by an adult at all times. **Time:** Allow 1 hour minimum. **Phone:** (755) 553-2707.

#### LA CRUZ DE HUANACAXTLE

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# MANZANILLO, COLIMA

FOUR DIAMOND
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CLEAN

Travel Advisory: We do not recommend travel to the state of Colima due to the U.S. Department of State's "Do Not Travel" warning. The acute level of crime and violence in this area prohibits AAA inspections.

Manzanillo (mahn-sah-NEE-yoh) began attracting foreign visitors in the 1970s, thanks to such natural attributes as twin bays, golden-sand beaches and a lush backdrop of tropical jungle. What really put this commercial port on the tourist map was the 1974 opening of Las Hadas, a luxurious vacation hideaway conceived by Bolivian tin magnate Antenor Patiño. The hotel was chosen as the setting for the 1979 film "10," although for many that movie's most striking image was a corn-rowed Bo Derek jogging along the beach.

#### **Practicalities**

Playa de Oro International Airport is about 47 kilometers (29 miles) northwest of Manzanillo, on the way to Barra de Navidad. Inside the small terminal building are rental car

counters, several shops and a restaurant. Airlines providing service include Aeroméxico and WestJet. The domestic commuter airline Aeromar, phone 01 (800) 237-6627 (toll-free long distance within Mexico), offers regular flights to Manzanillo from Mexico City. For additional information about airlines see Arriving by Air, page p. 28.

Discovery Mundo provides round-trip shuttle van service between the airport and selected hotels.

First-class bus service from Manzanillo to Puerto Vallarta and Guadalajara is provided by ETN. The bus station (Manzanillo Central de Camiones) is off Boulevard Miguel de la Madrid, just north of downtown and just inland from the Las Brisas beach area. For additional information about buses see Bus Service, page p. 36.

From Guadalajara, Manzanillo can be reached by car via two-lane Mex. 80, which runs into coastal Mex. 200 at Barra de Navidad, or by toll highway Mex. 54-D, which passes through Colima. Driving on coastal road Mex. 200 from Puerto Vallarta is recommended only for the

adventurous—particularly during the July-through-September rainy season, when downpours can create hazardous potholes and unexpected detours.

## City Layout

Downtown Manzanillo occupies a narrow isthmus at the southern end of Manzanillo Bay. It's a noisy, bustling jumble of shipyard activity and railroad tracks. There are few tourist amenities to be found here, although an ongoing port beautification project—undertaken to help establish the city as a port of call for cruise ships—has resulted in a landscaped promenade.

Jardín de Obregón, the main plaza, is at the north end of downtown overlooking the harbor, which is studded with Mexican military vessels. This small square has an elaborate bandstand and a gazebo. Near the plaza are courts where pickup basketball and fútbol games attract lively crowds of spectators. Avenida México, the city's main commercial thoroughfare, runs south from the plaza.

The resort area spreads out north and then west of town along the shores of twin bays, Bahía de Manzanillo and Bahía de Santiago. Santiago Peninsula separates the bays. Tourist-oriented Manzanillo Bay encompasses the harbor and is where the reasonably priced hotels are located. The more luxurious homes, condos and resort properties are in the vicinity of Santiago Bay.

Note: Mex. 200 is referred to as the Santiago-Manzanillo Highway or the Costera Highway; the official name is Boulevard Miguel de la Madrid. There are three major crossroads along this highway: with the road to the Santiago Peninsula and Las Hadas by Brisas Resort; with the road to the Las Brisas Peninsula, the resort area closest to town (known as the *crucero*); and heading into downtown Manzanillo, Mex. 200 then continues southeast along the coast toward Colima.

Roads, many of them dirt, branch off Mex. 200, leading to resort and condominium developments. City buses (the newer ones are blue and white) make a circuit from downtown north along Mex. 200 and the shores of the two bays. Destinations are marked on the left side of the windshield; for example, "Centro" (downtown), "Las Brisas," "Las Hadas" or "Santiago." The fare is inexpensive—less than \$1 (U.S.) from the main resort areas to downtown—and it's a convenient way to get a look at the coastline without driving.

#### The Beaches

There are several beaches along the wide curve of Manzanillo's two bays. Playa las Brisas is the closest to town, although to reach it by road requires detouring around Laguna de San Pedrito to the narrow strip of land fronting Manzanillo Bay. Older hotels and restaurants line

both sides of the bayfront drive, a popular destination for weekenders from Guadalajara.

Beyond Playa las Brisas is the long curve of goldenbrown sand called Playa Azul. The water gets rougher heading north toward the Santiago Peninsula, and the bottom drops off sharply along much of this stretch, making it problematic for wading or swimming.

The water in Santiago Bay, which is not used for shipping, tends to be cleaner than at the beaches fronting Manzanillo Bay closer to town. One of the area's best swimming beaches is Playa la Audiencia, which occupies a pretty, sheltered cove below jungle-covered hills on the north side of the Santiago Peninsula. The rocky outcroppings here are one of Manzanillo's few good snorkeling spots.

Farther around Santiago Bay is Playa Miramar, frequented by windsurfers and boogie boarders. Beyond Playa Miramar, the shoreline curves to form the Juluapan Peninsula. Here the water becomes tranguil and the beach is dotted with thatch-roofed souvenir shops. Locals crowd this area on Sundays.

Swimmers should exercise care due to occasional rough surf, and flags are posted at most beaches to indicate conditions. A red flag means potentially hazardous conditions; a white flag means safe conditions.

About 49 kilometers (30 miles) southeast of Manzanillo and accessible by bus is Playa Cuyutlán, a beach known for the Ola Verde, or "Green Wave." This mountainous wave-with crests that are said to reach 30 feet or more from March through May—seems to be more talked about than actually seen. The greenish hue is due to the glow of phosphorescent marine organisms.

Despite their color, the waves pounding this beach are impressive at any time. The black sand is the result of crushed volcanic rock. The long, open beach, backed by coconut palms, is all but deserted during the summer; lifeguards are normally present during the high season (December to May). Swimmers should heed the rough seas and strong undertows.

The village of Cuyutlán, which consists of a few budget hotels and a handful of seafood shacks, drowses away most days, although Semana Santa (Holy Week) brings an influx of Mexican families. Facilities are very basic, but it's an appealing day trip for those seeking solitude. To get there, take a local bus to the town of Armería, south of Manzanillo on Mex. 200; buses leave frequently from Armería for Cuyutlán. There is a signed turn-off for Cuyutlán on Mex. 200, about 5 kilometers (3 miles) north of Armería; it can also be reached via the Manzanillo-Colima toll highway (Mex. 200-D) that parallels the railroad line.

#### Recreation

It's easier to arrange activities like tennis, horseback riding, scuba and fishing trips, sunset cruises and golf outings if you're staying at an all-inclusive hotel that provides them. If not, try one of the local travel agencies, which have offices along Boulevard Miguel de la Madrid. They can arrange tours of the city and trips to such nearby destinations as Colima, the state capital, and Barra de Navidad.

The peak season for sport fishing in the self-proclaimed "sailfish capital of the world" is November through March. Marlin, dorado, tuna and wahoo can also be hooked. There are two annual fishing tournaments, one in November and one in January. Reservations for fishing excursions can be arranged through any of the resorts; booking as part of a group will lower costs.

Ocean Pacific Adventures offers deep-sea fishing excursions departing from the La Perlita dock in downtown Manzanillo; phone (314) 335-0605. Again, going with a group will be less expensive. Cheaper still are the pangas (outboard motor-powered launches) operated by individual owners; determined haggling can lower the fee.

Honeycombed with lagoons, the coastal region offers good bird-watching. Laguna de Cuyutlán, just south of Manzanillo, attracts different species depending on the season. Herons, pelicans and flamingos can be seen at Laguna de las Garzas (Lagoon of the Herons), the waterway separating the Las Brisas Peninsula from the mainland. The views here are especially nice at sunset.

The 18-hole La Mantarraya golf course, at the Las Hadas resort, offers plenty of water hazards, notably the waterencircled tee-off at the finishing hole. The course is open to the public, although hotel guests receive preferred tee times. To make reservations phone (314) 331-0101.

Tennis courts, all lighted for night play, are located at the following resorts: Las Hadas by Brisas, on the Santiago Peninsula off Boulevard Miguel de la Madrid and the Tesoro Manzanillo, on the Santiago Peninsula at Av. de la Audiencia #1.

Although Manzanillo is geared more toward relaxing at the beach than to sightseeing, its premier resort, Las Hadas by Brisas, is an attraction in itself. Standing on the eastern side of the Santiago Peninsula, it resembles a Moorish village bristling with minarets, cupolas and turrets. If you're not a guest you can still stroll the luxuriously landscaped grounds, although restaurant reservations are

needed to enter the property through the guarded gate. The marina here accommodates vessels for a fee, and adjacent to the marina is a calm bay where boats can be moored without a fee.

The University Museum of Archeology is on Avenida Niños Héroes a few minutes north of the downtown area, on the San Pedrito campus of the University of Colima. Displays include numerous metal and shell artifacts from western Mexico as well as fabrics, looms and fabricmaking implements. Hours vary, so call ahead to make sure the museum is open; phone (314) 332-2256.

## Shopping, Dining and Nightlife

Clothing and gift boutiques pop up here and there along Boulevard Miguel de la Madrid, and there is a shopping arcade at Las Hadas by Brisas.

Vendors at the beaches peddle everything from jewelry to shell ornaments. Playa Audiencia has a group of vendor stalls, including one where you can have a weave of Bo Derek-style cornrow braids (trensitas) added to your natural tresses. More vendor stalls at Playa Miramar sell jewelry, beachwear and Mexican handicrafts.

The resort hotels all have reliably good (and reliably pricey) restaurants, but for fresh seafood in a casual atmosphere try El Bigotes 1, Mex. 200/Boulevard Miguel de la Madrid # 3157 (a short distance south of Sam's Club). One of the house specialties is shrimp breaded with shredded coconut and then fried. American-owned Juanito's, on Boulevard Miguel de la Madrid at Km 14, Playa Olas Altas, is a relaxed hangout popular for breakfast as well as burgers, fries, crispy chicken tacos, ribs, milkshakes and fresh fruit smoothies. You also can check your email and access the internet here.

Casual dress is standard at Manzanillo restaurants (resort wear at the more expensive places). Keep in mind that a service charge may automatically be added to the bill (in addition to the 16 percent IVA tax). While purified water is used at the well-known restaurants, you might want to steer clear of the enramadas (beach shack restaurants) and outdoor taco stands unless you have a castiron stomach. See the Lodgings & Restaurants section for AAA Diamond designated dining establishments.

Colima State Tourism Office: Blvd. Miguel de la Madrid #1033, in the vicinity of Playa Azul. Open Mon.-Fri. 9-3 and 5-7, Sat. 10-2.



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# MAZATLÁN, SINALOA

Mazatlán (mah-saht-LAHN) is the Mexican beach resort that typifies the good old days, when all you needed was a clean hotel room, reliable sunshine and cheap tacos. Unlike Cancún and Los Cabos, gringo-friendly destinations that have gone increasingly upscale with a glut of all-inclusive luxury resorts and over-the-top nightlife, this Pacific port's vacation pleasures are more subdued. It also has something those other two lack: a historic downtown core that's well worth your precious time.

German immigrants had helped transform Mazatlán into an international shipping port in the late 19th century, and today the German influence is still evident in Old Mazatlán. The European architecture and wrought-iron balconies also have a French Quarter feel. The refurbishment of the once-crumbling Angela Peralta Theater (see attraction listing) and its restoration efforts have sparked a blossoming cultural scene filled with fun things to do. Art galleries and specialty shops ensure that you'll bring home something more unique than a Pacífico beer T-shirt, while beautiful Plazuela Machado, ringed with breezy sidewalk food places, is the Mexico you won't find in Cancún.

#### **Practicalities**

Besides beaches, one of Mazatlán's attractions is its relative proximity to the U.S. border. As a result, a greater percentage of the city's tourist traffic arrives by motor vehicle, at least when compared to beach resorts farther south and the colonial cities of the southern interior. Mazatlán is about 750 miles from the border at Nogales via Mex. 15/15-D. Expect to pay at least 750 pesos in toll charges along the entire stretch. Although dollars are usually accepted at toll booths near the U.S. border, have pesos on hand just in case.

Note: Toll charges can go up without warning, and fees for different types of vehicles aren't always posted. As in the rest of Mexico, night driving is not recommended. Plan on a 2-day trip from the United States.

Rafael Buelna International Airport is about 40 kilometers (25 miles) south of downtown via Mex. 15. It's a good 45-minute drive from the airport to the major resort areas. Alaska, American and Delta airlines offer direct international flights from the United States. Other airlines providing service to Mazatlán are Aeroméxico and Volaris. WestJet and Sunwing Airlines offer seasonal nonstop airline fares from select Canadian cities. For additional information about airlines see Arriving by Air, page p. 28.

Colectivo shuttle van service to downtown Mazatlán or the hotel zones costs about \$12 (U.S.) per person. Airport taxis have yellow stripes and an airplane logo. Fares average \$25-\$45 (U.S.), based on distance traveled; payment is in cash only. Private taxis hired in front of the

airport will cost around \$30-\$40, which can be cut by sharing the ride; the driver usually will carry up to four people. A taxi is the only way to get back to the airport, and will cost \$25-\$30.

Elite provides first-class bus service to many inland Mexican cities, including several daily departures for Mexico City and Guadalajara. Elite also offers service north to the border at Nogales, Ariz. The main bus terminal (Central de Autobuses de Mazatlán) is just off Carretera Internacional (also called Avenida Ejército Méxicano) between Ramón López Alvarado and Lola Beltrán, 3 blocks inland from the malecón (Avenida del Mar). For additional information about buses see Bus Service, page p. 36.

Baja Ferries provides automobile-passenger service linking Mazatlán with La Paz (see separate listing under Baja California) on the Baja California Peninsula. The ferry departs 3 days a week from the Playa Sur terminal, at the southern end of town near the sport-fishing docks; sailing time is about 15-18 hours. Schedules and rates are subject to change. Double-check both prior to departure and purchase tickets in advance; for details phone Baja Ferries at (669) 985-0470 (English may not be spoken). For additional information see Ferry Service, page p. 36.

The city is a port of call for cruise vacation companies, including Carnival, Holland America and Norwegian. To find out which ships will be calling on Mazatlán, check with the cruise lines or your AAA Travel Agent.

Banks are generally open Mon.-Fri. 9-6 and set aside morning hours-normally 8:30 to 11:30 a.m.-to exchange foreign currency. Almost all banks have ATMs that accept most bank cards; withdrawals are in pesos. Some machines also dispense U.S. dollars, which are widely accepted in Mazatlán. Casas de cambio (currency exchange houses) stay open longer than banks, although their rates are usually not as good; you pay for the convenience.

The post office is downtown on Avenida Benito Juárez. in front of the cathedral and across the street from the main plaza.

Mazatlán's weather can be characterized as tropical, although not as hot as points farther down the coast. From November through May, daytime temperatures are in the 70s, nighttime temperatures in the 60s. It's hotter and more humid during the summer months, but afternoon highs are usually in the 80s rather than the sultry 90s. The ocean water is warmest in late summer and fall. Leave your heavy coat at home; the temperature at this seaside location has never dropped below 50 F.

July, August and September are the rainiest months; the rest of the year rain is infrequent and seldom a threat to vacation plans. Clothing is decidedly informal—bathing suits, shorts, jeans and T-shirts—unless you wish to "dress

up" in casual resort wear if you're planning things for couples to do, such as an evening out to dinner or a club.

Note: As a result of Mexico's ongoing drug war there is a police presence in Mazatlán, and you may see armed officers on the street, even in the city's tourist zones.

# **City Layout**

Mazatlán occupies a peninsula that juts into the Pacific Ocean, forming Bahía del Puerto Viejo, a natural bay and protected harbor. The main approach into the city is via Mex. 15, which becomes the International Highway (Carretera Internacional).

Mex. 15 essentially loops around the destination, changing names in the process. As Avenida Rafael Buelna, it veers west off Carretera Internacional, passing the bullring and ending at the Sábalo traffic circle at the waterfront. It then proceeds south as Avenida del Mar and Paseo Claussen. It skirts the southern edge of downtown as Avenida Miguel Alemán, running east to Port Avenue (Avenida del Puerto). At the customs office it becomes Avenida Gabriel Levva and continues east toward the airport. Once out of town, Mex. 15 heads south to Tepic and Guadalajara.

The *malecón*, or waterfront boulevard, runs along the coast for some 17 kilometers (11 miles). In Mazatlán this thoroughfare also changes names—four times. At the southern end of the city (the old downtown area), it is called Paseo Claussen. North of downtown it becomes Avenida del Mar. At Punta Camarón (Shrimp Point), the name changes to Avenida Camarón Sábalo. At this point it runs inland and is paralleled by Avenida Playa las Gaviotas (formerly called Rodolfo Loaiza), along which several of the city's luxury hotels sit. After a mile or so the two streets rejoin. Farther north the name changes again to Avenida Sábalo Cerritos as the street runs north to the marinas.

Stroll the *malecón* for interesting things to see, including seafront sculptures. While this is not the avant-garde statuary you'll see farther south in Puerto Vallarta, these creations make for an interesting walk. Along Playa Olas Altas, sculptures depict a deer, mermaids and "La Mujer Mazatleca," a woman dramatically embracing the heavens. "La Continuidad de la Vida" (The Continuity of Life) features a nude man and woman perched atop a huge seashell, the man gesturing to a pod of leaping dolphins.

The Fisherman's Monument (Monumento al Pescador), on Avenida del Mar north of Playa Olas Altas, is a local landmark. This sculpture of a woman and a fisherman dragging his net—both of them again sans clothing—is a curious sight. Farther north, along Avenida del Mar across from Avenida Lola Beltran, suds lovers will find a tribute to Mazatlán's very own Pacífico Brewery in the form of a huge copper beer vat.

The section of town north of the *malecón* along Avenida Camarón Sábalo is known as the Golden Zone (Zona Dorada). Welcome to turista central. Here, a chain of high-rise hotels and mega resorts front some of Mazatlán's finest beaches. Running behind the hotels is a garish commercial drag jam-packed with fast food places, bars, local restaurants, mini markets, souvenir shops, car rental offices and banks. While the comforts of home are certainly convenient, the area isn't exactly picture postcard material.

Near the Golden Zone's southern end, where Avenida Playa las Gaviotas splits off from the main thoroughfare and runs behind the hotels fronting Playa Gaviotas, are more food places and several nice shops. But no matter where you go in the Golden Zone, be aware that you're also in the "Time Share Zone"—and the sharks here are particularly aggressive. If you're not interested in a "free tour" (read: time share presentation), it's advisable to give them the cold shoulder.

Icebox Hill (Cerro de la Nevería), in the Olas Altas area, is residential. A gradually ascending road reaches its summit, from which are views of a great part of the city, the immense blue bay and awe-inspiring sunsets that tint the sea and clouds a brilliant orange-red. Nearby El Mirador, off Paseo Claussen, is where daring locals plunge from a platform 45 feet above turbulent water surrounded by dangerous rocks. The feat requires expert timing; without the cushioning effect of a wave, a diver meets just 6 feet of water. In the evening these young daredevils carry flaming torches for a theatrical effect. Tips are expected.

Old Mazatlán, just inland from Playa Olas Altas, is the oldest part of the city. Blocks of buildings and private residences—including rows of town houses with wroughtiron and stone trim—line the narrow streets, especially along avenidas Heriberto Frias, Venus and Niños Héroes.

Plaza Principal, the main plaza (also called Plaza Revolución), is in the heart of the historic center across the street from Mazatlán's 19th-century cathedral, the Basilica of the Immaculate Conception. With its wrought-iron benches, shoeshine stands and vendor carts shaded by bushy trees and palms, the plaza is the city's communal hub.

If you're trying to find the "other plaza," Plazuela Machado, walk to the south end of Plaza Principal (away from the cathedral) and head west 2 blocks on Calle Angel Flores. Make a left on Avenida Carnaval and follow it for 2 blocks to this beautiful little plaza, a shady oasis surrounded by colorful colonial buildings housing cafes and restaurants. Teenagers smooch on the wooden benches, and in the late afternoon local expatriates walk their dogs. Outdoor art shows are held regularly, and occasional music concerts take place under the green wrought-iron gazebo. After dark the atmosphere es muy romántico.

The Mazatlán Art Museum (Museo de Arte Mazatlán), downtown at Calle Sixto Osuna and Avenida Venustiano Carranza (a block off the *malecón*), displays works by Mazatleco artists as well as such nationally known figures as José Luis Cuevas. Film screenings, concerts and other cultural events also take place. Phone (669) 981-5592.

At the southern end of town are the ferry terminal, tour boat operators, sport-fishing fleets and commercial port activities. Standing guard over the harbor's entrance is El Faro, said to be the tallest lighthouse in the Western Hemisphere and second only to Gibraltar in the world, with a range of some 35 nautical miles. Those undertaking the strenuous half-hour hike up the rocky pinnacle will be rewarded with an expansive view of the harbor and ocean.

Another vista of the city and its watery surroundings particularly lovely in the evening—can be seen from the top of Lookout Hill (Cerro de Vigía), a short distance north of El Faro. This climb, also steep, is better made via taxi.

There are more great city views at the historic Hotel Posada Freeman, now part of the Best Western chain. An elevator whisks you to the 12th-floor "Sky Room," a casual bar with big picture windows offering panoramas of city and sea. The rooftop has a swimming pool and lounge chairs; the latter are available to non-hotel guests who order drinks. Nicknamed "Mazatlán's Skyscraper," the Freeman welcomed its first guests in 1944.

Waterfront sprawl makes walking an ill-advised means of exploration. Fortunately, there are several public transportation options. *Pulmonias*, the city's signature taxis, are essentially open-sided golf carts souped up with Volkswagen parts. They make the Zona Dorada circuit, travel up and down the *malecón* and seat three passengers comfortably (four is a squeeze).

The vehicles were nicknamed *pulmonia* by rival cabbies, who told potential fares that riding in a chilly open-air car would result in the flu (it apparently didn't, judging from their ubiquity, and the name stuck). Always negotiate the fare in advance, as pulmonias tend to be more expensive than a taxi. A word of caution: Pulmonias do not have seat belts and they emit strong exhaust fumes.

Red-and-white or green-and-white Eco taxis are usually four-door sedans. These taxis are not metered; agree on the fare before you get in the vehicle. *Aurigas* are red pickup trucks with benches built into the truck bed and a canopy to provide shade. They seat a maximum of eight passengers. These vehicles also are not metered; fares are based on the length of the trip. Many aurigas follow fixed routes, but they can also be hired for day trips to nearby destinations out of town. To arrange a private trip, contact the Sindicato de Aurigas de Mazatlán; phone (669) 981-3535.

For 10 pesos one can get to just about any place in the city via local bus lines. The "Sábalo-Centro" route is the most useful for tourists. These buses run along the waterfront between the Zona Dorada hotels and downtown. Buses marked "Sábalo-Cocos-Centro" or simply "Centro" also travel between the two areas, but unless you're interested in a lengthy detour through the city's working class neighborhoods, avoid them.

"Cerritos Juárez" buses follow a route from Mazatlán's coffee factory to the Zona Dorada and then north to the marinas, ending at Playa Los Cerritos. The fare for the comfier, air-conditioned green buses, which are only available on the "Sábalo-Centro" and "Sábalo-Cocos-Centro" routes, is 10.5 pesos. A knowledge of Spanish is helpful if you intend to get around by bus. During rush hour, about 5 to 7 p.m., buses that are full may pass waiting passengers. During off hours it's often possible to hail a bus as you would a taxi.

#### **Beaches**

Mazatlán's beaches offer something for everyone and accordingly attract different groups of sun seekers. Some are visited mainly by Mazatlecos; others draw tourists. The following beaches are described as they are located from south to north along the coast.

Stone Island (Isla de la Piedra), at the southern end of the city, is actually a peninsula offering miles of mostly undeveloped oceanside beaches that can be explored on horseback. Small motorboats carry passengers to and from the island (about a 5-minute ride), departing from a launch along the harbor channel north of the ferry terminal. On weekends—and particularly Sunday—entire families spread out along the sand or under the coconut palm groves. Open-air restaurants offer smoked fish, shrimp and beer along with music and dancing.

Playa Olas Altas was the city's first tourist beach and is where the *malecón* begins. The name means "high waves," and surfers congregate here during the summer. This is not the best beach for swimming; instead, enjoy the tremendous views of the surf from one of the many outdoor cafes that line the seaside walkway.

Playa Los Piños, located between the Marine House and the Fisherman's Monument, is where local fishermen sell their catch. If you're interested in purchasing fresh fish without angling for it, arrive early; the catch disappears quickly. Just north of Playa Los Piños is Playa Norte, which stretches between the Fisherman's Monument and Punta Camarón. This beach is popular with locals who play impromptu baseball and soccer games in the sand or take to the water on a three-wheeled floating trike.

Playa Martín fronts the seaside promenade along Avenida del Mar. A tunnel connects the beach with the Hotel Hacienda Mazatlán. Big Pacific rollers crash against the rocks at Punta Camarón. On the north side of this outcrop jutting into the water is Playa las Gaviotas, popular with tourists who want to soak up some sun or play a game of beach volleyball.

Farther up is Playa Sábalo, where the wide, white sand beach attracts droves of tourists and what seems like an equal number of Mexican vendors. Parasailers and windsurfers utilize this stretch fronting the Golden Zone. It is protected from the open surf by Bird, Deer and Goat islands, which rise out of the water a short distance offshore.

Beyond Playa Sábalo, at the north end of Mazatlán, are Playa Brujas (Witches' Beach) and Playa Los Cerritos, which stretch north to Cerritos Point (Punta Cerritos). To reach these beaches, either hire a taxi (about \$8-\$10 U.S. one way from the Golden Zone) or hop on the "Cerritos-Juárez" bus heading north. The line ends near Playa Los Cerritos. To get to the shore, walk straight ahead past a long, squat building packed with souvenir stalls. Rustic palapa restaurants sit on a low bluff overlooking the beach, which is crowded with Mexican families on weekends. During the week, swimming is good at this mostly unspoiled stretch of sand protected by rocky outcroppings.

Playa Brujas also is within walking distance of the bus stop. Head west up the only narrow paved road in sight and follow it to Restaurant Playa Bruja, a nice *palapa* bar overlooking the sand. Playa Brujas was once an isolated surfing outpost, but condo and hotel development continues to creep ever closer.

## **Sports and Recreation**

Fishing in Mazatlán ranks among the best anywhere. Striped marlin are hooked between November and April; sailfish and black marlin are caught between May and October. Other game species taken from the Pacific waters include blue marlin, bonito, dolphin and yellowfin tuna. Wellequipped fleets are headquartered at the docks at the southern end of town, where the ferry and charter tour boats are moored, and at Marina El Cid in the Golden Zone.

Charter fishing boat rates start at \$300 (U.S.) a day for a small boat (up to four people) and include bait and tackle, but not fishing licenses or refreshments. Tipping the captain and first mate is customary, particularly if the day's catch has been bountiful. A catch-and-release policy is emphasized. Make fishing arrangements in advance of your trip with either the fleet itself or through your hotel. Hotels will usually try to arrange group travel excursions, thereby sharing the cost of boats.

The El Cid Resort offers a variety of fishing packages utilizing its own Aries fleet of boats. For information and reservations phone (855) 513-4080 (from the United States), or contact a travel agency. Local charter companies include Star Fleet, phone (669) 982-2665, and Flota Bibi Fleet, phone (669) 148-2055. Sport-fishing guides depart from Marina Mazatlán in the Golden Zone; for marina information phone (669) 916-7799.

Baseball in Mazatlán is considered something of a tradition. Loyal fans fervently support the local Pacific League team, the Mazatlán Venados, which has produced players who have gone on to the American majors. Games are played at Teodoro Mariscal Stadium, off Avenida del Mar and convenient to the tourist zone. For game schedules, ask at your hotel or check the team's website; the season runs October through January.

Parasailing, which provides 15 minutes of sheer thrills for those not prone to vertigo, is one of the adventurous things to do in Mazatlán. Arrangements can be made in front of the Playa Mazatlán and Las Flores hotels in the Golden Zone.

Adventure travel enthusiasts also should visit The Aqua Sports Center at the El Cid Resort. There's a variety of water sports equipment, from jet skis and Hobie Cats to kayaks and snorkeling gear.

The El Cid Golf & Country Club features three courses—the nine-hole Marina Course, designed by Lee Trevino; the nine-hole El Moro Course; and the nine-hole Castilla Course, which has the most forgiving layout of the three. Greens fees are \$45-\$65 (U.S.); preferred tee times are given to resort guests. For additional information phone (855) 855-2222 (from the United States).

The Robert Trent Jones-designed championship course at the Estrella del Mar resort community on Isla de la Piedra, just south of Old Mazatlán, features six holes bordering the ocean, offering spectacular views. Amenities include a pro shop and clubhouse. For information, phone 01 (800) 727-4653 (toll-free long distance within Mexico) or (888) 587-0609 (from the United States).

Good for a casual round is the nine-hole course at the Mazatlán Country Club (Club de Golf Campestre), and the greens fee is significantly less expensive than at the resort courses. Motorized carts are usually not available, but you can hire a caddy. The club is at the south end of town off Mex. 15 via Avenida Bahía Acapulco; take a taxi. Walk-ins are normally accommodated, or phone (669) 980-1570 to schedule a tee time (English not likely to be spoken).

# **Shopping**

Shopping in Mazatlán is centered primarily along avenidas Playa las Gaviotas and Camarón Sábalo in the Golden Zone. The shops and galleries here feature the usual assortment of T-shirts, sportswear, resort wear, jewelry, handicrafts and leather goods. Most are open Monday through Saturday; some do not accept credit cards.

Be sure to stop by Sea Shell City, a combination museum and shop on Av. Playa las Gaviotas #407. A kaleidoscopic variety of shells from around the world are on display, and there are many shell craft items as well as Mexican handicrafts for sale. Upstairs there's a cool fountain with shell embellishments.

Across the street, Las Cabañas Shopping Center is a small shopping arcade with the usual trinkets. At the far end you'll find Pancho's Restaurant and steps leading down to Playa las Gaviotas, where roving beach vendors are waiting to pounce.

The nearby Mazatlán Arts and Crafts Center, on Avenida Playa las Gaviotas (at Avenida Loaiza), stocks everything from tablecloths and rugs to pottery, guayabera shirts, embroidered dresses and footwear. Artisans can sometimes be seen creating both artwork and jewelry designs. Purchases here are cash only.

If you're looking for jewelry of a better pedigree than what the beach vendors are peddling, Cielito Lindo, Av. Playa las Gaviotas #311, has a huge selection at surprisingly reasonable prices.

For a more authentic Mexican shopping experience, head downtown. In the Central Market (mercado), at avenidas Ocampo and Juárez in Old Mazatlán, you'll find aisle after aisle crammed with vendor stalls selling everything from fresh meat, seafood and produce to piñatas, shoes and Che Guevara T-shirts. More stalls line the outside walls of the market building. As far as non-food items go, good quality can be hard to find, but for dedicated bargain hunters the opportunity to haggle with local merchants is the real fun.

Art galleries are located on the streets west of Plazuela Machado; pick up a free map published by Art Walk Mazatlán, available at many of the galleries. The Nidart Gallery (Nido de Artesanos) occupies a bright purple and red-trimmed building next to the Angela Peralta Theater in Old Mazatlán. This gallery and studio complex (the name means "nest of artisans") features leather masks, sculptures, burlap dolls, decorated coconut shells, jewelry, clay figurines and other crafts expertly fashioned by local artisans. It's open Mon.-Sat. 10-3 during the high tourist season.

Casa Etnika, Calle Sixto Osuna #50, is a contemporary Mexican art gallery that occupies a large 19th-century house. The ground-floor rooms are filled with fine furniture, sculpture, paintings, wildlife photography prints, baskets, jewelry and more. You'll also find gifts for children (Mazatlán coloring books) and high-quality T-shirts (a rarity in Mexico). There's a small gourmet coffee bar next to the gallery entrance.

South of Avenida Rafael Buelna off Avenida Reforma, a block inland from the *malecón* (Avenida del Mar) and across from Sam's Club, is La Gran Plaza, an Americanstyle mall. The supermarket and department stores make this a convenient place to go to stock up on basics. It is easily reached by taxi or the Sábalo Cocos bus.

# Dining and Nightlife

Mazatlán calls itself the "shrimp capital of Mexico." In addition to the big hotel restaurants and fine dining spots. there are numerous establishments along the *malecón* serving fish filets, various shrimp concoctions or such Pacific coast specialties as pescado zarandeado, filleted and grilled snapper coated with a chile/achiote marinade.

In and around Old Mazatlán's Central Market, food stands sell tasty tacos, tortas and the like. Better yet, head a few blocks southwest to Plazuela Machado and dine alfresco at one of the sidewalk cafés.

The Hotel Playa Mazatlán, on Avenida Playa las Gaviotas in the Golden Zone, presents "Fiesta Mexicana" one time a week beginning at 7 p.m. from November through May (less frequently the rest of the year). An all-youcan-eat buffet is followed by folkloric dance and music performances from various regions of Mexico. The entertainment includes an amazing display of rope twirling by a charro, or Mexican cowboy, and a flamboyantly costumed troupe who re-enact a bit of Carnaval.

Admittance to the shows is first-come-first served. Dress is casual, but shorts are not permitted. For information and tickets phone (669) 989-0555, or stop by the tour desk inside the hotel lobby.

Most of the local restaurants and hotels in Mazatlán offer purified water and ice. There should be no cause for concern about drinking the water in these establishments, but double check if in doubt. Purified water can be bought in any of the mini markets around town. See the Lodgings & Restaurants section for AAA Diamond designated dining establishments.

Note: Some food places add a standard 10 to 15 percent gratuity to the bill. Be sure to differentiate between this charge and the 16 percent IVA tax that is added to every check, and tip accordingly.

Many of the big hotels in the Golden Zone have bars or lounges with happy hours featuring two-for-one drink prices. For a more rocking good time head to Joe's Oyster Bar. There's a well-signed entrance on Avenida Playa las Gaviotas, or you can enter this thatch-roofed cantina from the Golden Zone beachfront. The music is mostly hip-hop, with a few Latin jams mixed in for the local clientele. Late afternoon happy hour sees college kids dancing on tables, older tourists eating jumbo oysters and two-man volleyball teams engaged in heated matches on the sand volleyball court. The scene gets much wilder after the sun sets.

Gus y Gus (pronounced "goose and goose"), in the Golden Zone at Av. Camarón Sábalo #1730 (across from the Costa de Oro Hotel), is a casual bar and grill with a fun atmosphere and a menu of American and Mexican staples. Classic rock cover bands provide the music.

There's another Gus v Gus at the Marina Mazatlán complex (Boulevard Marina Mazatlán #2209).

#### **Events**

The year's biggest party is the pre-Lenten Carnaval, or Mardi Gras, held in late February or early March. All Mazatlán—not to mention revelers from around the world—gathers for 5 days and nights of fireworks, parades with elaborate floats, the coronation of a festival queen (La Reina de Carnaval) and of course, plenty of music and dancing. If you'll be visiting around this time, make hotel reservations several months in advance and inquire regarding exactly when Carnaval begins. Expect prices to climb as well.

Historical records of the event date to 1827, when military men demanding salaries staged a protest by masquerading. Over the years the tradition grew, with mask wearing becoming part of the festivities at both public assemblies and private parties. By the end of the 19th century, French, German and Italian immigrants were adding facets of their own culture to Carnaval, and today the city claims that its celebration is the world's third largest after those in Rio de Janeiro and New Orleans. The revelry culminates on Shrove Tuesday, when the *malecón* is packed with merrymakers and things to see.

Mazatlán recognizes Day of the Dead celebrations Nov. 1 and 2 with a combination of feasting and somber remembrances. Several sport-fishing tournaments also occur in November.

# **Nearby Destinations**

A guided travel tour is a good way to see both the city and towns in the surrounding area. Information about tours of Mazatlán and vicinity can be obtained at the major hotels or any local travel agency. Note: Beware the numerous sidewalk entrepreneurs who offer free tours; their real goal is to pitch the sale of time share units.

Day excursions also can be arranged to the islands off the Golden Zone section of the coast: Goat Island (Isla de Chivas), Bird Island (Isla de Pájaros) and Deer Island (Isla de Venados), a nature preserve where seashell collectors can search along the shore and snorkelers will find decent submarine scenery when waters are calm.

The El Cid Resort offers a trip to Deer Island aboard an amphibious vehicle for 150 pesos per person; snorkeling gear is available for rent. Daily departures are at 9:30 and 2:30. There are no services or local restaurants on the island, so pack a cooler with drinks and snacks. If you forget, the men who rent out beach umbrellas also sell beer and soda on the sly. For information on adventure travel, contact the resort's Agua Sports Center; phone (669) 913-0451.

Perhaps the most popular guided day trip from Mazatlán takes in the former mining outposts of Concordia and Copala, both on Mex. 40 as it heads east toward Durango (see place listing under Northwestern Mexico). These two colonial-era towns offer a charming, laid-back contrast to Mazatlán's seaside partying atmosphere.

Concordia, in the foothills of the Sierra Madre Occidental, is surrounded by mango and banana plantations. Founded in 1565 by Spanish conquistador Francisco de Ibarra, it is still a furniture, brick and pottery making center; roadside stands sell furniture, pottery and fresh mangos. The main plaza contains a gazebo and an enormous wooden chair that provides an amusing photo opportunity. Across from the plaza is the baroque Church of St. Sebastian, a lovely old building that has an ornate stone facade.

Copala, about 24 kilometers (15 miles) east of Concordia, is smaller and not as bustling but just as picturesque. A walk down this village's cobblestoned main street past red tile-roofed, whitewashed buildings is like a journey back in time. Little has changed in the town's more than 400 years of existence. Cars are few and far between. Dogs, chickens, pigs and donkeys wander the streets, and dawn is greeted by the sound of crowing roosters. Adding to the scene is the brilliantly colored bougainvillea that spills over roofs and cascades down walls.

Up until the late 19th century Copala was a center for silver mining operations in the surrounding mountains, and old homes still cling precariously to the hillsides. The treeshaded town plaza has wrought-iron lampposts and an ornate bandstand and is bordered by small gift shops selling silver jewelry and regional handicrafts. At one end of the plaza stands the baroque Church of San José, which was completed in 1775; it has a vaulted interior with gold leaf decoration and colorful polychrome statues of saints.

South of Mazatlán via Mex. 15 is Rosario, another old mining community. At the end of the 18th century it had a population of 7,000 and was one of the richest towns in northwest Mexico. Mining activities ceased in the 1940s. Of particular interest is Our Lady of the Rosary, the town's beautiful colonial church, with a marvelous altarpiece completely covered by intricate gold-leaf designs. Some 70 kilometers (43 miles) of underground tunnels, dug over a 300-year period to aid in extracting gold and silver, remain behind; locals attest that they outnumber the surface streets.

Mex. 40-D, the toll road from Mazatlán to Durango, is an exhilarating road trip for drivers who have experience with challenging mountain roads (see description under the Durango place listing). The clearly signed toll sections branch off portions of old, free Mex. 40, allowing motorists to avoid the more treacherous switchbacks and hairpin

curves that make a journey along the aptly named "Devil's Backbone" such a gut-clenching experience.

The arguable highlight of this spectacular journey across the Sierra Madre Mountains is the Baluarte Bridge (Puente Baluarte). A suspension marvel, it straddles the Sinaloa/Durango state border at a dizzying 1,322 feet above the Baluarte River. All told, an amazing number of bridges and tunnels were required to negotiate these impressively rugged mountains.

The drive time to Durango is approximately 3 hours (versus the 6-8 hours it formerly took to negotiate the serpentine length of old Mex. 40). There are four toll plazas between the two cities; fees total around 500 pesos.

Sinaloa State Tourism Office (Coordinación General de Turismo de Sinaloa): at Av. del Mar #882 (between downtown and the Golden Zone). The staff speaks English. Open Mon.-Fri. 9-5. Phone: (669) 981-8883.

**ANGELA PERALTA THEATER** (Teatro Angela Peralta) is 3 blks. s. of Plaza Machado at Av. Carnaval #47 (at Calle Libertad). It opened in 1874 as the Teatro Rubio. Renowned opera singer Angela Peralta, dubbed "the Mexican Nightingale," arrived for an engagement in 1883 but contracted cholera and tragically died (along with most of her company) before uttering a single note.

After stints as a Mardi Gras ballroom, movie palace, boxing arena and parking garage, the theater was abandoned and in ruins before being restored and reopening in 1992. The performance schedule includes ballet, folkloric dance, concerts, operas and plays. Rehearsal schedule permitting, the opulent interior can be viewed; photo displays on the second-floor mezzanine chronicle the theater's history and restoration.

Time: Allow 30 minutes minimum. Phone: (669) 982-4446.

BASILICA OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION (Basilica de la Inmaculada Concepción) is downtown on the n. side of Plaza República, at Calle Benito Juárez and Av. 21 de Marzo. It is easily recognized by its gold-colored twin spires. The late 19th-century exterior is rather plain, but the beautifully preserved interior is very ornate, with numerous gold accents.

MAZATLÁN ARCHEOLOGICAL MUSEUM (Museo Arqueológico de Mazatlán) is at Calle Sixto Osuna #76, just e. of Paseo Olas Altas. The small collection focuses on paintings, clay figurines and regional artifacts. There also is an exhibit that covers the Mexican Revolution and Mazatlán's early history. Most background information is in Spanish. **Phone:** (669) 981-1455. **GT** 



AZTECA INN

**BOOK NOW** 669/913-4477



Motel. Address: Ave Playa Gaviotas No 307 82110.

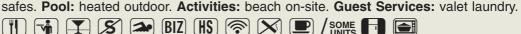


# BEST WESTERN HOTEL POSADA FREEMAN ZONA DORADA BOOK NOW

669/989-4400





















Hotel. Address: Ave Camaron Sabalo 777 82110. Location: Oceanfront. Facility: Meets AAA guest room security requirements. 50 units. 5 stories, interior corridors. Amenities:











## BEST WESTERN POSADA FREEMAN

BOOK NOW

669/985-6060



Hotel. Address: Ave Olas Alta's No 79 Sur 82000. Facility: 72 units, some efficiencies. 12 stories, interior corridors. Bath: shower only. Amenities: safes. Dining: 2 restaurants.

Pool: outdoor. Guest Services: valet laundry.























COURTYARD BY MARRIOTT MAZATLAN BEACH RESORT

**BOOK NOW** 



AAA Benefit: Members save 5% or more and earn Marriott Bonvoy™ points when booking AAA/CAA rates!

SAVE Hotel. Address: Avenida Playa Gaviotas 214 82110.

EL CID CASTILLA BEACH HOTEL

**BOOK NOW** 

669/989-6969



Resort Hotel. Address: Ave Camaron Sabalo S/N 82110.

EL CID EL MORO BEACH HOTEL

BOOK NOW

669/989-6969



Resort Hotel. Address: Ave Camaron Sabalo S/N 82110.

EL CID GRANADA COUNTRY CLUB BOOK NOW

669/989-6969



Hotel. Address: Ave Camaron Sabalo S/N 82110.



EMPORIO MAZATLAN

**BOOK NOW** 

669/983-4611



Hotel. Address: Ave Camaron Sabalo 51 82110.

GAVIANA RESORT BOOK NOW

669/983-5333



Resort Hotel. Address: Ave Playa Gaviotas No 100 82110.

**BOOK NOW** HOLIDAY INN RESORT MAZATLAN 669/989-3500

Hotel. Address: 420 Av Playa Gaviotas 82110.

HOTEL COSTA DE ORO BOOK NOW 669/913-5344

INSPECTED @ CLEAN

THREE DIAMOND INSPECTED @ CLEAN

THREE DIAMOND INSPECTED @ CLEAN

THREE DIAMOND INSPECTED @ CLEAN

Resort Hotel. Address: Ave Camaron Sabalo No 710 82110.

HOTEL PLAYA MAZATLAN BOOK NOW 669/989-0555

Hotel. Address: Ave Playa Gaviotas No 202 82110.

**BOOK NOW** HOTEL PUEBLO BONITO MAZATLAN 669/989-8900

Hotel. Address: Ave Camaron Sabalo 2121 82110. THREE DIAMOND

IBIS MAZATLAN MARINA **BOOK NOW** 

Hotel. Address: 6300 Av Del Delfin 82110. **APPROVED** 

THE INN MAZATLAN **BOOK NOW** 669/913-5500

Resort Hotel. Address: 6291 Ave Camaron Sabalo 82110.

MAYAN PALACE MAZATLAN BOOK NOW 669/989-4000

Hotel. Address: Calz Sabalo-Cerritos S/N 82100.

MOTEL MARLEY **BOOK NOW** 669/913-5533

Extended Stay Motel. Address: Ave Playa Gaviotas No 226 82110. **APPROVED** INSPECTED @ CLEAN

THE PALMS RESORT OF MAZATLAN **BOOK NOW** 669/913-2222

Hotel. Address: Ave Camaron Sabalo 696 82110.



# PARK INN BY RADISSON MAZATLAN BOOK NOW 669/989-3800



Hotel. Address: Ave Sabalo Cerritos 3170-A 82112. Location: Oceanfront. Facility: 118 units, some two bedrooms. 7 stories, interior corridors. Bath: shower only. Amenities: safes. Pool: heated outdoor. Activities: beach on-site, exercise room. Guest Services: valet laundry.





























PARK ROYAL MAZATLAN BOOK NOW 669/988-0324

THREE DIAMOND INSPECTED @ CLEAN Hotel. Address: Blvd Sabalo Cerritos No 3110, Marina Mazatlan 82100.

# PUEBLO BONITO EMERALD BAY RESORT & SPA BOOK NOW 669/989-0525



Resort Hotel. Address: Ave Ernesto Coppel Campana S/N 82110. Location: Oceanfront. Facility: This luxurious beach resort has sumptuous public areas and an enormous three-tiered pool area. The rooms exude obvious refinement and offer spectacular views. The spa is luxurious and worth a visit. Meets AAA guest room security requirements. 411 units, some two bedrooms, efficiencies and kitchens. 2-4 stories, interior corridors. Amenities: safes. Dining: 5 restaurants. Pool: heated outdoor. Activities: sauna, hot tub, steamroom, beach on-site, tennis, recreation programs, health club, spa. Guest Services: valet laundry, area transportation.



























QUALITY INN MAZATLAN BOOK NOW 669/989-2323



Hotel. Address: Bugambilias 100 82110.



RIU EMERALD BAY HOTEL BOOK NOW 669/989-7900



Resort Hotel. Address: Ave Sabalo-Cerritos No 3404 82112.



ROYAL VILLAS RESORT BOOK NOW

669/916-6161

THREE DIAMOND INSPECTED @ CLEAN Hotel. Address: Ave Camaron Sabalo No 500 82110.







Hotel. Address: Ave Playa Gaviotas No 222 82110.

#### WHERE TO EAT



ANGELO'S RESTAURANT 669/989-8900



Italian Casual Dining. Address: Ave Camaron Sabalo 2121 82110.

#### **NUEVO VALLARTA, NAYARIT**



THE GRAND BLISS BOOK NOW 322/226-4031



Boutique Contemporary Hotel. Address: Boulevard Riviera Nayarit, #254 63735. Facility: Thanks to colorful artwork and hip, contemporary décor, the hotel lobby is a stunner. Rooms are spacious with a modern design and as an added bonus, all include a large balcony. 168 units, some two bedrooms. 9 stories, interior corridors. Parking: valet only. Amenities: safes. Pool: heated outdoor. Activities: recreation programs. Guest **Services:** valet and coin laundry, area transportation. Affiliated with Mayan Resorts.





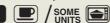
















# GRAND LUXXE RESIDENCE CLUB BOOK NOW 322/226-4031



Contemporary Resort Hotel. Address: Boulevard Riviera Navarit, #254 63735. Facility: A contemporary design and luxurious appointments are hallmarks of the spacious rooms here. Guests enjoy personal attention from their private floor concierge, who will also provide butler services. 1175 units, some two bedrooms, three bedrooms, efficiencies and kitchens. 4-9 stories, interior corridors. Parking: valet only. Amenities: safes. Dining: 8 restaurants, entertainment. Pool: outdoor, heated outdoor. Activities: hot tub, scuba diving, snorkeling, regulation golf, recreation programs, health club, spa. Guest Services: valet and coin laundry, area transportation. Affiliated with Mayan Resorts. (See ad on insert, starting on p. 144.)

































### THE GRAND MAYAN NUEVO VALLARTA BOOK NOW 322/226-4031



Resort Hotel. Address: Boulevard Riviera Navarit #254 63735. Facility: This huge resort complex features outstanding public facilities. Guests enjoy trolley transportation throughout the property grounds, which include an abundance of restaurants and a shopping mall. 778 units, some efficiencies. 9 stories, interior corridors. Parking: valet only. Amenities: safes. Dining: 6 restaurants. Pool: outdoor, heated outdoor. Activities: hot tub, regulation golf, recreation programs, health club, spa. Guest Services: valet and coin laundry, area transportation.



























# GRAND VELAS RIVIERA NAYARIT BOOK NOW 322/226-8000



Resort Hotel, Address: Ave Cocoteros Sur No 98 63735, Location: Oceanfront, Facility: This luxurious all-inclusive spa retreat offers outstanding facilities and a prime beachfront setting. Spacious rooms feature large balconies, with especially good views from the upper floors, 267 units, some two bedrooms, 9 stories, interior corridors, Parking; valet only. Amenities: safes. Dining: 5 restaurants, also, Frida, Lucca, Piaf, Sen Lin, see separate listings, entertainment. Pool: heated outdoor. Activities: sauna, hot tub, steamroom, beach on-site, scuba diving, snorkeling, tennis, recreation programs, kids club, bicycles, health club, spa. Guest Services: valet laundry.

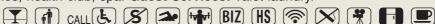




































HAMPTON INN BY HILTON NUEVO VALLARTA BOOK NOW 329/111-5000



AAA Benefit: Members save up to 10% and earn Honors points when booking **AAA/CAA** rates!

SAVE Hotel. Address: 115 Carr Federal 200 63735.

# HARD ROCK HOTEL VALLARTA BOOK NOW 322/226-8470

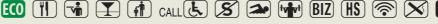


Resort Hotel, Address: Paseo de Los Cocoteros 19 Villa 8 Naut Turist 63735, Location: Oceanfront. Facility: The all-inclusive beachfront resort features many dining options, a huge tropical pool and nightly entertainment. Rooms are spacious and hip. 362 units. 6-8 stories, interior corridors. Parking: on-site and valet. Amenities: safes. Some: video games. Dining: 6 restaurants, entertainment. Pool: heated outdoor. Activities: sauna, hot tub, steamroom, beach on-site, cabanas, self-propelled boats, scuba diving, recreation programs, kids club, bicycles, game room, health club, spa. Guest Services: valet laundry.



































HOTEL RIU VALLARTA BOOK NOW 322/226-7250





Resort Hotel. Address: Ave de Los Cocoteros S/N Lote K 63732.



KRYSTAL GRAND NUEVO VALLARTA BOOK NOW

322/3566649



Boutique Resort Hotel. Address: 800 Blvd Costero 63732.

# MARIVAL DISTINCT LUXURY RESIDENCES BOOK NOW 322/226-9740



Resort Hotel, Address: Ave Paseo de Los Cocoteros Lote 53 Villa 8 11 63732, Location: Oceanfront. Facility: Guests enjoy full hotel services when staying in the property's luxurious, fully equipped residences. The all-inclusive plan includes access to a private beach club. 169 kitchen units, some two and three bedrooms. 2-6 stories, exterior corridors. Parking: valet only. Amenities: safes. Dining: 5 restaurants. Pool: heated outdoor. Activities: beach on-site, self-propelled boats, snorkeling, tennis, recreation programs, kids club, bicycles, playground, health club, spa. Guest Services: complimentary and valet laundry, area transportation.





























# MARIVAL EMOTIONS RESORT & SUITES BOOK NOW 322/226-8200



Resort Hotel. Address: Blvd Paseo Cocoteros S/N 63732. Location: Oceanfront. Facility: A prime beachfront location, excellent dining options and spacious accommodations all add up to top-rate, family-oriented all-inclusive resort. 497 units, some two and three bedrooms, 3-6 stories, interior corridors, Amenities; safes, Dining; 6 restaurants, entertainment. Pool: heated outdoor. Activities: self-propelled boats, scuba diving, snorkeling, tennis, recreation programs, kids club, game room, exercise room, spa. Guest Services: valet and coin laundry.



THREE DIAMOND INSPECTED @ CLEAN



































MAYAN PALACE NUEVO VALLARTA BOOK NOW 322/226-4031

Resort Hotel. **Address:** Boulevard Riviera Nayarit, #254 63735.

PARADISE VILLAGE BEACH RESORT & SPA **BOOK NOW** 322/226-6770

THREE DIAMOND INSPECTED @ CLEAN Resort Hotel. Address: Paseo de Los Cocoteros No 1 63732.

RIU JALISCO

BOOK NOW 322/226-6600

THREE DIAMOND INSPECTED @ CLEAN Resort Hotel. Address: Ave de Los Cocoteros Riviera Nayarit 63732.

RIU PALACE PACIFICO BOOK NOW 322/176-0090

FOUR DIAMOND INSPECTED @ CLEAN Resort Hotel. Address: Ave de Los Cocoteros Lote G 63732.

SEA GARDEN NUEVO VALLARTA

**BOOK NOW** 

322/226-4031

INSPECTED @ CLEAN

Hotel. Address: Paseo de Las Moras S/N 63735.

VILLA DEL PALMAR FLAMINGOS BEACH RESORT AND SPA

**BOOK NOW** 

322/226-8100

THREE DIAMOND

INSPECTED @ CLEAN

Resort Hotel. Address: Paseo de Los Cocoteros No 750 Sur 63732.



# WY VILLA LA ESTANCIA BOOK NOW

322/226-9700



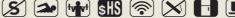
Hotel. Address: Paseo de Los Cocoteros No 750 Sur 63732. Location: Oceanfront. Facility: Located beachfront, the hotel offers spacious, luxury studio units and one-bedroom suites, each fully equipped for upscale leisure. 250 units, some two bedrooms, three bedrooms, efficiencies and kitchens. 8-10 stories, exterior corridors. Parking: valet only. Amenities: safes. Dining: 2 restaurants, also, La Casona, see separate listing. Pool: heated outdoor. Activities: hot tub, beach on-site, recreation programs, health club, spa. Guest Services: valet laundry.























INSPECTED @ CLEAN

WYNDHAM ALTRA VALLARTA BOOK NOW

322/226-8700



Resort Hotel. Address: Paseo de Los Cocoteros, Lotes 32 y 33 63732.

#### WHERE TO EAT



#### BISTRO BLEU 322/226-4000



French Fine Dining. **Address:** Ave Paseo de Las Moras S/N 63735.



#### **FRIDA** 322/226-8000



Mexican Fine Dining. Expert Advice: From the thoughtful menu planning to the bright and colorful décor, the attention to detail makes this a truly memorable fine dining experience. The chef uses timeless recipes to create an extensive menu featuring freshly prepared Mexican fare from various regions of the country. The wine list offers a nice variety of Mexican wines. Servers specialize in tableside preparations; don't miss the made-to-order guacamole. Features: full bar. Reservations: required. Semiformal attire. Address: Ave Cocoteros Sur No 98 63735. Parking: valet only.



### IL PESCATORE RISTORANTE 322/226-6670



Italian Fine Dining. Address: Paseo de Los Cocoteros No 1 63732.



#### LA CASONA 322/226-9700



Steak Fine Dining. Address: Paseo de Los Cocoteros No 750 Sur 63732.



#### **LUCCA** 322/226-8000



Italian Fine Dining. Expert Advice: Classic highlights on Lucca's menu include starters like tuna carpaccio, eggplant parmesan and a traditional bean soup. Main courses feature a wide selection of pastas, gourmet pizzas, risotto, seafood and meats, such as rack of lamb, or marinated salmon. Specialty coffees and desserts like tiramisu or creamy amaretto cake are the perfect finish. The dining room is elegant, with guests enjoying their meal while a pianist entertains, some evenings. Features: full bar. Reservations: required. Address: Ave Cocoteros Sur No 98 63735. Parking: valet only.



#### 322/226-8000



French Fine Dining. Expert Advice: Classic French cuisine is presented in a serene room with live soft music. The attentive staff will see to your every need, offering dishes such as lobster cream soup with cognac, foie gras and escargot. Mains include slow-cooked short ribs, lamb shank or Rock Cornish hen. You may choose to end your meal with the peach Melba, the enticing saffron crème brûlée or a specialty soufflé. Features: full bar. Reservations: required, for non-hotel guests. Address: Ave Cocoteros Sur No 98 63735. Parking: valet only. D





Asian Fine Dining. Expert Advice: Don't miss a chance to explore the tastes and textures of fine Asian fare at this chic upscale restaurant. The chef has incorporated a variety of cooking styles and techniques, with his standout ingredients. Specials include spicy tempura udon noodles, fried soft-shell crab, or roasted duck with red curry. You will also see influences from Thailand and Vietnam. The staff are expertly trained on the menu and are ready to offer recommendations. Features: full bar. Reservations: required.

Address: 98 Ave Cocoteros Sur 63735. Parking: valet only.



### TRES AROMAS AT VIDANTA VALLARTA 322/226-2400



Mexican Fine Dining. Expert Advice: Enjoy unique Mexican cuisine while gazing at some striking, contemporary art in the lobby of the Grand Luxxe. If you prefer a tropical feel, there's also an elegant outdoor patio. The chef has crafted an interesting menu that celebrates regional fare with an innovative contemporary touch. Examples include selections such as sea bass in a green mole sauce, rib-eye ceviche, lobster tacos or New York strip steak in a tequila and veal demi-glace. A wide variety of wine and tequila are featured. Features: full bar, patio dining. Reservations: required, for non-hotel guests. Address: Boulevard Riviera Nayarit, #254 63735. Parking: valet only.

#### PUERTO ESCONDIDO, OAXACA

Puerto Escondido (PWEHR-to ehs-cohn-DEE-doh) means "hidden port," and until fairly recently the translation was quite appropriate. The town was named for Punta Escondida, the rocky outcrop that protects a half-moon bay. A port was established here in 1928 as a shipping point for coffee grown on the forested seaward slopes of the Sierra Madre del Sur. Coastal Mex. 200 came through in the 1960s, opening up the area to tourism.

Among the first visitors were surfers, who were drawn by the big waves and dirt-cheap lodgings. Today they're still here, but Puerto Escondido is no longer a hideaway and not quite as cheap. Instead, it's an established destination, frequented by an international group of travelers preferring a more laid-back alternative to the shiny expense of Bahías de Huatulco and other carefully planned seaside resorts.

#### **Practicalities**

The international airport is about 3 kilometers (2 miles) west of town off Mex. 200, near the newer hotel and resort development around Playa Bacocho. It receives flights from Mexico City via Aeromar (usually on twin-turboprop airliners) and VivaAerobus. Taxis and less expensive colectivos (minibuses) operated by Transportes Terrestres shuttle airport passengers to and from hotels. For additional information about airlines see Arriving by Air, page p. 28.

Puerto Escondido is about 113 kilometers (70 miles) west of Huatulco via Mex. 200, often referred to as the Carretera Costera (Coastal Highway). Driving from Acapulco or Huatulco is not recommended for safety reasons; the winding road is also potholed, particularly during the July-through-September rainy season. If you do drive, avoid doing so after dark.

Mex. 200 divides the town roughly in half. The older, upper section, above the highway, is where most residents live and conduct their daily business. Below the highway is the newer, tourist-geared waterfront. Hotels, restaurants and shops spread for about a mile along the main thoroughfare, Avenida Peréz Gasga. At noon each day, chains are raised at the eastern and western ends of the beachfront strip, closing the street to vehicular traffic. At the western end of this pedestrian zone, Gasga begins winding uphill and crosses Mex. 200, where its name changes to Avenida Oaxaca (Mex. 131). The junction, marked by a traffic signal, is known as El Crucero.

The local bus stations are all within a block or so of the El Crucero intersection. Estrella Blanca provides firstclass service along Mex. 200 between Acapulco and Bahías de Huatulco (be sure to specify the La Crucecita

terminal as your destination if you're taking a bus to Huatulco from Puerto Escondido). The station is on Avenida Oaxaca, just north of the El Crucero junction.

Casa de cambio (currency exchange) houses are on each side of Peréz Gasga near the Rincón Pacífico Hotel.

#### The Beaches

A lighthouse atop Punta Escondida at the western end of the bayfront affords a panoramic view of town. Running east from the rocky cove beneath the lighthouse is Playa Principal, the in-town beach. Here the stretch of sand is narrow, the water calm and the beach backed by rustling palms. It can be crowded: Mexican families flock here on Sundays and holidays to wade and paddle in the shallows, and local fishermen cast their nets at the sheltered west side of the bay or launch small, colorfully painted boats. Do not walk along the beaches at night because of the possibility of robberies or muggings.

To the east of Playa Principal is Playa Marineros, which begins at the jutting rocks below the Hotel Santa Fe. Here the shoreline begins curving toward the south and increasingly faces the open ocean. The surf gets rougher, and swimmers should exercise caution.

Farther to the southeast is Playa Zicatela, considered to be one of the world's best surfing beaches. The wide expanse of golden-colored sand stretches for miles, and the thundering Pacific breakers crashing onto it are impressive indeed. The biggest waves occur between August and November. Spectators line the beach to watch daredevil surfers finesse the "pipeline," a long tubular swell of water. Needless to say, swim here at your own risk.

West of town are the coves of Puerto Angelito and Carrizalillo. These sheltered spots are ideal for snorkeling and scuba diving; bring your own gear, as facilities are limited at best. They can be reached either by taxi, a boat launched from Playa Principal or a circuitous concrete footpath (wear a hat and bring water if you decide to walk). Farther west is Playa Bacocho, another open strip of sand; the waves and undertow make it better for sunning and hiking than swimming. Most of the more expensive hotels cluster around this beach.

#### What To Do

The main reason to visit Puerto Escondido is to relax at the beach; shopping and entertainment are not high on the list of diversions. The local *mercado* (municipal market) is in the upper section of town on Avenida 10 Norte, several blocks west of Avenida Oaxaca. It sells mostly produce, but one group of stalls offers a selection of regional handicrafts. Along the tourist strip, there are a

few clothing shops and the usual hodgepodge of T-shirts, postcards and souvenirs.

Several restaurants line beachside Avenida Peréz Gasga, with fish and seafood—from sushi to octopus—the main menu items. Most places provide a view of the beach and the activity along it. The restaurant in the Hotel Santa Fe, on Avenida del Morro at the eastern end of the bay (about half a mile southeast of the town center), has good food and a breezy atmosphere, with tables overlooking the Playa Zicatela surf.

The best places to watch the sun sink into the Pacific are along Playa Zicatela, where there is an unobscured view of the western horizon. The cliff-top lawn on the grounds of the Posada Real Hotel, west of town overlooking Playa Bacocho, is an ideal perch for sunset watching. A taxi can get you there. There are a couple of noisy bars and dance clubs in the tourist zone along Avenida Peréz Gasga and in the hotels around Playa Bacocho.

The surrounding coastal region is a natural paradise, and because most locations are inaccessible except by boat, eco-tourism is actively promoted. Hidden Voyages Ecotours offers seasonal (mid-Dec. to late March) guided bird-watching and nature trips to some of the lagoons that indent the Oaxacan coast. Early morning motorboat trips visit Manialtepec Lagoon, about 15 kilometers (9 miles) west of Puerto Escondido, which is encircled by mangroves and home to a rich variety of wetland bird species and tropical vegetation. The company also offers kayak tours of the lagoon.

Round-trip transportation is provided from Puerto Escondido hotels. Food is not included; the restaurant at the departure dock sells beverages to go. Bring a hat and sunblock. Binoculars are provided. The motorboat trip departs Monday, Wednesday and Friday at 7 a.m.; the kayak trip departs on Thursdays at 6:30 a.m. The motorboat tour fee is 900 pesos per person; the kayak tour fee is 1,000 pesos per person.

Reservations are required. From mid-December through March phone (954) 582-2962 in Puerto Escondido (English is spoken). Reservations can also be made through the Dimar Travel Agency, Av. Peréz Gasga #905 on the beachfront. Office hours vary; phone (954) 582-2305. This agency also can arrange three- or fourperson fishing trips to the waters off Puerto Escondido for mackerel, sea bass, snook or tuna. Boats depart from Playa Principal.

**Tourist information office:** near the airport, at the intersection of Mex. 200 (Carretera Costera) and Avenida del Pacífico. Open Mon.-Fri. 9-2 and 5-8, Sat. 9-1. Phone: (954) 582-0175.



© iStockphoto.com / opimages

# Puerto Vallarta

City Population: 291,839 Elevation: 6 meters (20 feet)

#### **Editor's Picks:**

Church of Our Lady of Guadalupe	(see r	Э.	303)
El Centro	(see p	Э.	303)
Playa Mismaloya	(see p	Э.	306)

# **GOOD FACTS TO KNOW**

# WHOM TO CALL

Police: In case of emergency, dial 060 and ask to be connected to an English-speaking operator. For nonemergencies phone (322) 290-0507.

Consumer Protection Agency (PROFECO): Avenida Francisco Villa #900 (second floor); phone (322) 225-0000 (English may not be spoken fluently). The office is open Mon.-Fri. 9-3 and can assist with time share, taxi, store and other consumer-related issues.

Hospitals: Ameri-Med Hospital, in Plaza Neptuno at the entrance to Marina Vallarta (Boulevard Francisco Medina Ascencio), (322) 226-2080; CMQ Downtown Hospital, Basilio Badillo #365 at Insurgentes, (322) 223-1919; Red Cross (Cruz Roja), Avenida Río Balsas (at Avenida Río de la Plata), (322) 222-1533. All of these facilities are open 24 hours.

Local phone calls: If you don't have a cellphone, use public Telmex phones marked "Ladatel" rather than calling from your hotel room, which almost always incurs a hefty per-minute charge. Ladatel phone cards are available in various denominations from most local stores. Avoid phones with pictures of credit cards or decals saying "3 minutos gratis" that advertise long distance calling to the United States and Canada; the charges will be outrageous.

#### WHERE TO LOOK

#### Newspapers

Vallarta Today is an English-language daily newspaper geared toward tourists; it has information on everything from local restaurants to currency exchange rates.

#### Visitor Information

Municipal Tourist Office: in the City Hall building (Presidencia Municipal) at avenidas Juárez and Independencia. The office is open daily 8 a.m.-9 p.m. **Phone:** (322) 224-1175, or 01 (800) 719-3276 (toll-free long distance within Mexico).

There are several internet cafes where you can check email and surf online for an inexpensive 30-minute or hourly rate. Mi Internet Cafe, Av. Venustiano Carranza #345 (3 blocks south of the Río Cuale) is open daily; phone (322) 222-1442.

Banderas Bay American Legion Post 14 meets on the third Tuesday of the month at noon at Steve's Sports Bar, Basilio Badillo #286 (across from Memo's Pancake House).

Riviera Navarit Convention & Visitors Bureau: Paseo de los Cocoteros #1 (in the Paradise Plaza shopping center), Nuevo Vallarta, Nayarit. The office is open Mon.-Fri. 9-6, Sat. 9-2. Phone: (322) 297-2516.

#### WHAT TO KNOW

#### **Currency Exchange**

Banks are usually open Mon.-Fri. 9-5, although hours for exchanging foreign currency may be restricted and there's often a long waiting line. Currency exchange houses are open longer hours. ATM withdrawals are in pesos; receiving U.S. dollars usually requires a Mexican bank-issued ATM/credit card. Stores, restaurants, taxi drivers and street vendors will often accept dollars, but keep in mind that the minimum wage in Mexico is very low and workers in resort areas depend on tips to make a living. Always tip in pesos if possible, since U.S. coins are useless and dollars must be converted.

#### Staying Safe

Crimes targeting tourists are infrequent, and it's safe to walk the downtown streets. Avoid carrying large amounts of cash in public and don't wander along back streets after dark. A hotel safety deposit box is a good place to keep money, passports, airline tickets, tourist permits and so forth. Bilingual "tourist police" wearing white safari outfits and baseball caps patrol the downtown area and are generally friendly and helpful.

Note: For current information about safety/security issues in Puerto Vallarta, refer to the U.S. State Department website (travel.state.gov).

Adventurous travelers began visiting Puerto Vallarta during the 1940s and '50s, but it took a Hollywood director and a scandalous romance to put Vallarta on the mass tourism radar. Elizabeth Taylor came to Puerto Vallarta in 1963 to be near Richard Burton, who was on location

filming John Huston's "The Night of the Iguana," as the two were having a highly publicized extramarital affair. Photographers followed their every move, and Puerto Vallarta instantly became world famous.

Along cobblestone streets you'll find the usual line-up of gringo-friendly businesses, from casual Mexican restaurants and hip clothing boutiques to American chain stores and party-til-dawn nightclubs. But Vallarta (as the locals call it) also has an artistic bent. Surrealistic sculptures dot the bustling beachfront *malecón* (boardwalk), a prime destination for sunset strolls.

One-of-a-kind art galleries and shops fill the compact downtown area. Souvenir stalls line shady Isla Río Cuale, a long, slender islet in the middle of the Río Cuale, the river that bisects the downtown area on its journey from mountains to sea.

The Marina Vallarta complex sits just north of the Hotel Zone. Here, discount chains like Costco and Walmart serve an ever-growing population of Mexican transplants and expatriates from *el norte*. Yet somehow such namebrand consumerism doesn't overshadow Vallarta's prevailing Old Mexico charm.

As for when to visit Puerto Vallarta, the weather is balmy year-round, but it's nicest from mid-December through mid-April. This is also the time to see migrating humpback whales that swim down from the frigid Arctic to the warm Pacific waters. Book your travel reservations several months in advance to guarantee cheap airline flights if you intend to visit during the winter high tourist season.

Vallarta is very casual; most visitors wear shorts and T-shirts. Slacks or nice jeans for men and summer-type dresses for women are appropriate for more upscale restaurants and some nightclubs. A sweater comes in handy for winter evenings; effective sunscreen is a must all year.

Pack a hat and bring along an effective insect repellent, as mosquitoes can be a nuisance at any time of year. A formula containing at least 40 percent DEET will usually do the trick. If you arrive without bug spray, Autan Classic is a widely available Mexican brand.

# **Getting There**

# **By Air**

The Puerto Vallarta airport, Gustavo Díaz Ordaz International Airport, is off Mex. 200 (Avenida Francisco Medina Ascencio, also called the Carretera Aeropuerto), about 7 kilometers (4 miles) north of downtown. Alaska, American, Delta, Frontier, JetBlue, Southwest, Spirit, Sun Country and United all fly direct to Puerto Vallarta from the United States. Other airlines providing service to the city include Aeroméxico, Air Canada, Volaris and WestJet. For additional information about airlines see Arriving by Air, page p. 28.

The ticketing and arrival area is on the main level of the airport; customs is in the baggage claim area. Beyond customs is the main lobby, where tourists are likely to be approached by overly friendly timeshare salesmen offering to arrange discounted ground transportation; unless you're willing to endure a high-pressure sales pitch, ignore them. The departure area, which requires a boarding pass to enter, is on the upper level. Phone (322) 221-1537 for airport information.

Colectivos (minivans) operated by Transportes Terrestres provide shared transportation for a per-person fare from the airport to area hotels. You can purchase tickets at booths just outside the terminal. Specially licensed airport taxis also take passengers to hotels. In both cases, fares are based on a zone system. Zones are posted at the minivan and taxi ticket booths; ask if you don't know the zone in which your hotel is located.

### By Car

Puerto Vallarta is 1,200 miles south of the border at Nogales, Ariz., via Mex. 15/15-D and Mex. 200. Traffic on the Mex. 15 free road (libre in Spanish) slows considerably in the city of Mazatlán and beyond. Alternately, the Mex. 15-D toll road (cuota) is usually wide open. Tolls are hefty, however. While dollars are usually accepted at tollbooths near the U.S. border, have pesos on hand for the entire route.

Mex. 161 connects San Blas, on the Nayarit coast, with Puerto Vallarta, bypassing Mex. 15's uphill slog through Tepic, the state capital. While it's not any faster than 15, the Mex. 161 route is quite scenic. The generally wellmaintained two-lane road snakes through jungle-cloaked hills and passes farmland. If heading south from San Blas (which is accessible from Mex. 15 via Mex. 54), take the marked Puerto Vallarta turn-off just before the entrance to town and head south. Mex. 161 connects with Mex. 200 at the town of Las Varas; from there, proceed south. Plan on a 3-hour drive from San Blas to Puerto Vallarta.

**Note:** Mex. 200 is a winding two-lane road that passes through mountainous terrain. In addition to numerous twists and turns, road shoulders are narrow and have steep drop-offs. Only experienced motorists familiar with mountain driving should attempt to navigate this route, and never drive it at night.

# By Bus

Puerto Vallarta's main bus station, Central Camionera de Puerto Vallarta, is just off Mex. 200 (the highway to Tepic), about a kilometer north of the airport. The major first-class lines operate out of this station.

Vallarta Plus offers daily first-class bus service to and from Guadalajara (about 5 hours). Elite travels the route as well, and also offers service north to Tepic, Mazatlán, Mexicali and Tijuana and south to Manzanillo, Zihuatanejo, Acapulco and Puerto Escondido. Some buses require transfers or stop along the way, while others do not; the ticketing agent will be able to clarify routes and answer questions. ETN (Enlaces Terrestres Nacionales) offers "executive-class" service to Mexico City, Guadalajara and Manzanillo. For additional information about buses see Bus Service, page p. 36.

### **By Cruise Ship**

Puerto Vallarta is a port of call for the Carnival, Celebrity, Holland-America, Norwegian, Princess and Royal Caribbean cruise lines, most arriving from Los Angeles during the peak tourist season. Ships dock at the Maritime Terminal at the Marina Vallarta complex, about 3 miles north of downtown. Across the street from the terminal are shops, snack bars and guided tour kiosks. Taxis congregate around the terminal area; a ride downtown is negotiable but generally runs about \$8 (U.S.).

# **Getting Around**

### City Layout

North of the Río Cuale the primary thoroughfare is Mex. 200. Officially called Avenida Francisco Medina Ascencio. it changes names several times. The stretch of busy fourlane highway heading south from the airport and running behind the beachfront Hotel Zone is also known as the Carretera Aeropuerto (Airport Highway). South of the Hotel Zone, the road narrows and becomes Avenida México and then Paseo Díaz Ordáz as it runs along the waterfront.

**El Centro** (see attraction listing), the central downtown area, is small and compact, hemmed in between the mountains and the bay. The Río Cuale divides it into two sections. The *malecón* (oceanfront boardwalk) runs along Paseo Díaz Ordáz from north of the river south to the Romantic Zone, creating a pedestrian-only esplanade along this stretch of Ordáz. Drivers heading through downtown should use either Calle Morelos (one-way southbound) or Avenida Juárez (one-way northbound) as alternate routes.

Vacationers and locals alike come to enjoy the sea breeze, people watch and ponder the beautiful—and often bizarre—collection of bronze sculptures. Master sandcastle artists create additional eye candy on the narrow shore below the seawall. Across the street you can browse boutiques and souvenir shops, scout the nightclubs or sip a margarita at one of several restaurants and watch the sun set over the bay.

The heart of Vallarta, tree-shaded Plaza de Armas (also called Plaza Principal), sits just off the malecón between avenidas Morelos and Juárez. A central gazebo and a statue of Don Ignacio L. Vallarta, for whom the city was named, adorn this traditional town square where schoolchildren chase pigeons and overheated street vendors nap on benches. Tourists stroll by on their way to the Church of Our Lady of Guadalupe, its crown-topped spire soaring above the city. Visiting the Plaza de Armas and Church of Our Lady of Guadalupe are two of the top things to do in Puerto Vallarta.

On Avenida Juárez, facing the north side of the plaza, is City Hall (Presidencia Municipal). The mural of Puerto Vallarta hanging above the stairwell was painted by local artist Manuel Lepe. On the west side of the plaza between Avenida Morelos and the southern end of the *malecón* is an outdoor amphitheater, the site of evening concerts. The white arches (Los Arcos) backing the amphitheater were rebuilt after being destroyed by Hurricane Kenna in 2002.

The area known as Gringo Gulch was named for the intellectual and artsy Americans who settled in Puerto Vallarta during the 1950s and '60s. This steep ravine overlooking the Río Cuale is lined with red tile-roofed, colonial-style villas, many of them tucked away off cobblestone alleyways festooned with blooming bougainvillea.

To reach the gulch, walk up Calle Zaragoza toward the hillside above town. The street appears to dead-end, but look closely and you'll see a steep stone staircase. Climb it to continue on Zaragoza. The original Casa Kimberly, Elizabeth Taylor's former residence, was demolished in



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2011; a same-named boutique hotel now stands at the

Río Cuale Island (Isla Río Cuale), a long, narrow island in the middle of the Río Cuale, can be accessed from the northern and southern sections of El Centro by two road bridges, a pair of wood-plank suspension footbridges and a concrete pedestrian bridge that spans the mouth of the river. A walkway shaded by fig and rubber trees and lined with souvenir stalls runs its length, and there are several riverside places to eat. A statue of John Huston, who directed "The Night of the Iguana," stands in a shady plaza just east of the Avenida Insurgentes road bridge.

The area south of the Río Cuale, the Zona Romantica, is one of Vallarta's oldest neighborhoods. Although the whitewashed building facades don't look that different from what you see north of the river, the narrow cobblestone streets have a more ragged "Old Vallarta" feel. An eclectic mix of shops, restaurants and bars line east-west Basilio Badillo, 5 blocks south of the river.

The Zona Romantica's main beach is Playa de los Muertos, a popular stretch of sand lined with casual thatch-roofed restaurants and mid-range hotels. North of El Centro, luxury properties fronting pretty Playa de Oro (Golden Beach) form the upscale Hotel Zone. High-rise resort towers boast sweeping views of palm-fringed Banderas Bay.

Running behind the Hotel Zone is busy, four-lane Avenida Francisco Medina Ascencio. While it's not exactly ideal for a romantic stroll, the boulevard does offer a convenient assemblage of shopping centers packed with a predictable lineup of mini-markets, banks, gift shops, restaurants and American fast-food joints. Plaza Caracol, near the Fiesta Americana Puerto Vallarta All Inclu**sive,** is anchored by a Soriana supermarket.

Marina Vallarta is a resort destination unto itself. This complex near the airport encompasses major chain hotels, upscale condos, an enormous marina and yacht club and the 18-hole Marina Vallarta Club de Golf.

Deluxe mega-resorts occupy beachfront real estate, while the marina boardwalk is lined with tourist-geared shops, galleries, cafés and restaurants. The marina is a good choice if you're a first-time visitor or part of a package tour, although it lacks the charm of Puerto Vallarta proper.

Nuevo Vallarta, about 19 kilometers (12 miles) north of the airport, is just over the Nayarit state line at the mouth of the Río Ameca. This planned resort area is a mix of condominiums, timeshare units, private bayfront homes and fancy all-inclusive accommodations.

A bit farther north is the village of Bucerías ("place of the divers"), an enclave of cobblestone streets, walled villas and tidy little hotels. Some travelers prefer this lower-cost alternative to Puerto Vallarta for its many shops, town square market and casual open-air restaurants. The 5-mile stretch of white sand is the longest along the Banderas Bay coastline. The shallow shoreline is perfect for wading, body surfing and shell collecting, and the beach draws throngs of local families on Sundays. Bucerías is most easily reached by bus; minivans also shuttle passengers from the airport to the village and back.

#### **Rental Cars**

Keep in mind that rental cars are expensive, and downtown parking is difficult. For sightseeing in and around the city, take advantage of the green-and-white or blue-andwhite city buses that cover the area from Marina Vallarta south to Mismaloya Beach.

Note: AAA members enjoy discounts through Hertz for vehicles booked in the United States. Consult your local AAA club or phone Hertz, (800) 654-3080.

#### **Buses**

City buses are inexpensive and take passengers to almost all points along Banderas Bay, from the airport south through the Hotel Zone, into downtown via the Ignacio Vallarta Bridge, and to points as far south as Mismaloya Beach. The fixed, one-way fare (no transfers) is 7.5 pesos; it goes up to 22.5 pesos for more distant destinations like Nuevo Vallarta or Bucerías. Exact fare is appreciated, but drivers will make change for a \$20 peso note.

Stops are designated by a white bus outlined on a dark blue sign. If traffic is light, it's often possible to flag down a bus anywhere along the street. Destinations and routes (for example, "Centro," "Mismaloya," "Las Palmas" or "Marina Vallarta") are posted on the front of the bus or painted on the windshield. As you climb aboard and pay your fare, tell the driver where you want to be let off. Most drivers don't speak English but they do understand, for example, "El Sheraton Hotel, por favor." Local routes are normally covered from 6 a.m. to 11 p.m.

#### **Taxis**

Taxis are plentiful and cover the same routes as buses, but are more expensive. Fares are based on set rates and defined zones. The average fare within town is about \$5 to \$6 (U.S.); trips from downtown north to the Hotel Zone or Marina Vallarta will run up to about \$8, depending on the destination. A ride across town from Marina Vallarta south to Playa de los Muertos is about \$12 to \$14.

Fares normally are posted in each taxi and are printed in the Vallarta Today newspaper. Many hotels post a list of rates to specific destinations, which can come in handy if



you're unfamiliar with the city. Taxis also can be hired by the hour or by the day for out-of-town trips.

Always ask how much the fare is ("Cuanto?") and come to a decision before you get in the cab, which might save a few pesos. Resist efforts by any driver to steer you to a particular local restaurant; some restaurateurs pay commissions to drivers for bringing them customers. It also is customary not to tip drivers, unless they assist with luggage; in that case 10 pesos per suitcase or travel bag is appropriate.

#### **Parking**

Parking in the compact downtown area is scarce, and driving around the city in general presents a challenge. During the winter tourist season from December through April, the narrow streets are jammed; from July through October heavy rains can make them flooded and muddy. Many roads leading in to Puerto Vallarta are just two lanes and descend from the mountains; drive with caution.

#### **Guides/Tours**

The standard city tour provides an all-purpose Puerto Vallarta orientation. A short version of the tour covers the local sights by air-conditioned minibus, including the main plaza, cathedral and the exclusive neighborhoods of Conchas Chinas and Gringo Gulch. A shopping trip is usually made to either Isla Río Cuale or the Municipal Market.

The jungle tour is a longer version that throws in trips to a teguila tasting room and Mismaloya Beach, plus lunch in a tropical setting at Chico's Paradise. Hotel pickup and drop-off is included in the fee; lunch is not. Several companies offer daily city and jungle tours lasting 4 and 6 hours, respectively. Make arrangements through your hotel or at one of the guided tour reservation booths you'll see all over town.

If you're interested in adventurous things to do, Los Veranos Canopy Tour offers daily 4-hour excursions to their zipline course near Mismaloya Beach. Transportation from the tour office on Mex. 200 (just south of downtown) is included. Reservations are required; phone (322) 223-0504, or (213) 256-0381 (from the United States).

#### What To See

CHURCH OF OUR LADY OF GUADALUPE (La Iglesia de Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe) is on Calle Hidalgo, a block e. of Plaza Principal. It took 33 years to build. The church is noted for the large crown atop the steeple, modeled after one worn by Carlota, wife of Archduke Maximilian, Mexico's ruler for 3 years in the 1860s. Made of fiberglass, it replaced the original crown, which collapsed during an earthquake in 1995. Angels clasping hands

decorate the exterior. Do not wear shorts or T-shirts if you wish to enter the church.

CUALE MUSEUM (Museo del Cuale) is on Isla Río Cuale at the island's far western end, near Oscar's restaurant. Focusing on the indigenous peoples of western Mexico, this tiny archeology museum displays ancient pottery, figurines, jewelry and other objects. Information panels are in Spanish and English. Phone: (322) 223-2424 (cell number).

EL CENTRO encompasses the area inland from the malecón and n. of the Río Cuale. Puerto Vallarta's old downtown core is a delightful contrast to the newer resort development that has spread both north and south along the beaches. An irregular grid of narrow streets, lined with whitewashed stucco buildings with red-tiled roofs, extends some 6 blocks up into the hills above the bay. The cobblestone streets, full of little shops and offering vistas of lush green hills tumbling down to the bay, are a pleasure to stroll (wear comfortable shoes). Street names are denoted on Mexican tiles on the sides of buildings.

El Centro exudes charm despite sputtering taxicabs, aggressive bus drivers and occasional construction; such sights as the odd donkey clopping along the cobblestones are a flashback to a more prosaic Mexico.

MALECON SCULPTURES dot the boardwalk along Paseo Díaz Ordáz. Walking from south to north, you'll see a beautiful collection of bronze public sculptures that includes the "Fountain of Friendship" (Fuente de la Amistad), a dome-shaped fountain crowned with three leaping dolphins. The romantic "Triton & Nereida" depicts the son of Neptune reaching for his mermaid lover, perched atop a curling wave just beyond his grasp.

A Vallarta icon, "El Caballito del Mar" is the famous statue of a young boy riding a seahorse. Farther along the sculptures take a surrealistic turn. "In Search of Reason," by Guadalajara artist Sergio Bustamente, features a ladder to nowhere being climbed by two pillow-headed children. Perhaps the *malecón's* strangest installation is Alejandro Colunga's "Rotunda of the Sea" (La Rotunda del Mar); ringed by alien creatures with twisted shapes that form high-backed chairs, this is by far Vallarta's most bizarre photo-op. Nearby is an 8-foot-high, Dali-esque statue of a man filling his black obsidian pot belly with rocks; Jonás Gutierrez's 2006 installation is called "Eating Stones" (Come Piedras).

At the northern end is Mathis Lidice's "Millennium"; a wave twists and arcs toward the sky, topped by a female figure releasing a dove to the heavens. The sculpture represents "the feminine energy that will lead us into a new age."

NAVAL HISTORY MUSEUM is in the center of town (Co-Ionia Centro) at Calle Zaragoza #4. This small but wellmaintained museum has three rooms with exhibits about Acapulco pirates, the history and development of Mexican navigation and the role the Mexican Navy has played in the country's naval battles. Exhibit information is in Spanish, but a book with the information in English is available. Time: Allow 30 minutes minimum. Phone: (322) 223-5357.

OCEAN FRIENDLY TOURS depart from Los Peines pier, about a 10-minute taxi ride from the downtown waterfront. This company's guided whalewatch excursion is one of the best in Vallarta. Led by a professional researcher who has an infectious passion for these gentle giants, the trip begins with information about the whales' migration, mating and birthing activities, with emphasis on conservation and species protection. A hydrophone and speaker system on board allows passengers to listen to underwater humpback vocalizations.

In addition to humpback whales, dolphins, sea turtles, manta rays and varied bird species are likely to be seen. The 30-foot, customized fiberglass boat has a tiny restroom on board. Life vests, dry bags for camera protection, water, soft drinks and an onboard lunch are provided.

Phone: (322) 225-3774.

VALLARTA BOTANICAL GARDENS is 19 km (12 mi.) s. of Puerto Vallarta at Mex. 200 Km marker 24, following signs. Set in a tropical dry forest ecosystem 1,300 feet up in the Sierra Madre mountains, this 20-acre botanical garden features native and non-native collections of orchids, palms, ferns, bromeliads and succulents. The Tree Fern Grotto is representative of a tropical mountain environment, while the Blue Agave Hills is an area that was deforested for cattle grazing before being replanted with agaves, mountain pines, and tababuia and mahogany trees.

The newest facility, the Vallarta Conservatory of Mexican Orchids, provides a greenhouse environment for numerous varieties of orchids that are found nowhere else on Earth; Mexico is home to more than 1,200 orchid species. Promoting conservation of native flora, this professional operation appeals to both serious gardeners and nature lovers.

Getting here is an adventure, via a winding road up into the Sierra Madre foothills past a jungle gorge and an impressive granite formation covered with wild orchids, plumeria and vanilla bean. In addition to touring the gardens, you can take a dip in the crystal-clear Río Los Horcones.

"El Tuito" tourist buses depart regularly for the gardens from the corner of calles Carranzas and Aguacate in the Romantic Zone; one-way fare is 20 pesos. A taxi ride from Old Town will cost about \$25 (U.S.) each way. Bring water, sunscreen and insect repellent. Time: Allow 2 hours minimum. **Phone:** (322) 688-6206.

#### What To Do

#### **Dining**

Vallarta offers many options for dining well, if not particularly cheaply. A plus for foreign visitors is the purified water—including ice—that is universally used by licensed food and beverage establishments. (If in doubt, ask for bottled water, juice, beer or a soft drink.) While food quality is dependable, it is the striking ocean views that distinguish many local restaurants.

Most places to eat at hotels offer a standard steak and seafood menu. Seafood, Mexican and Argentinian are some of the choices at eateries along the 3 blocks of Calle Basilio Badillo between Pino Suárez and Insurgentes.

If you want to sample authentic Mexican cooking and rub elbows with locals, try Cenaduria Doña Raquel, at Leona Vicario #131 (half a block east of the *malecón*). Along the back wall of a small, simple dining room, Mexican women whip up delicious flautas, enchiladas and tostadas in an open kitchen. The pozole (pork, cabbage and hominy stew) is excellent—and for the adventurous eater, also available with a "triple portion of head meat."

For some of the city's tastiest and cheapest cuisine, grab a guick lunch at a sidewalk taco stand. You'll find them all over town, with an especially high concentration on the streets south of the Río Cuale in the Zona Romantica. Food vendor carts at the southern end of the *malecón* sell everything from fish on a stick to fresh-cut fruit. As is the usual case with street food and hygiene, use your best judgment. Does the operation look clean? Is it busy? If so, it's usually fine.

A casual dress code is the rule, although wearing shorts to dinner may be frowned upon at some of the nicer places. Some local restaurants shut down for a month during the summer.

# Shopping

Shoppers can browse for jewelry, especially silver; clothing ranging from the ubiquitous beach T-shirts to designer fashions; colonial-style furniture; pottery and ceramics; hand-tooled leather goods, including huaraches (sandals); shoes (keep in mind that sizes are measured in centimeters); and sombreros and other hats. Fine handicrafts include beaded tapestries from Nayarit, lacquered boxes and ceremonial masks from Michoacán, and handwoven baskets, rugs and shawls from Central America.

For a typical Mexican shopping experience, visit the open-air Municipal Market (Mercado Municipal), which

spreads out under the trees below the steps leading down from the northern end of the Avenida Insurgentes Bridge. Clothes, crafts, leather goods, silver jewelry and trinkets fill the two-level maze of stalls. Experienced hagglers may be able to persuade vendors to lower their prices un poquito (just a little bit). If that doesn't work, simply walk away and prices magically drop.

A similar but more atmospheric shopping experience lies just across the river on Isla Río Cuale. The island's shady *paseo* is chock-a-block with vendor stalls hawking all those must-have Mexico souvenirs like Corona beer wall clocks, *lucha libre* masks and Oakland Raiders ponchos. Some vendors offer quality items, but you'll have to seek them out.

Interested in more than a souvenir? You could spend an entire day visiting Puerto Vallarta's wide assortment of fine art galleries and distinctive shops and still not even scratch the surface. As home to one of the largest resident communities of painters, sculptors and craftspeople in all of Mexico, art is big here.

Galleries are spread throughout the entire downtown area; a handy "Old Town Art Walk" map is available at many galleries and also is printed in the Vallarta Tribune newspaper. However, with fine art pieces come eyepopping price tags and the challenge of getting your new treasures home safely. Most (if not all) gallery owners accept credit cards and can arrange shipping. Don't bother trying to haggle over price, as it's usually fixed and you will surely offend the proprietor-not to mention embarrass yourself.

North of the Río Cuale, Galería Uno, Calle Morelos #561 (at Avenida Corona), occupies a huge space with a range of Mexican contemporary art, including paintings, graphics and sculptures. It is open Mon.-Sat. 9-8. Galería Pacifico del Arte, Calle Aldama #174, specializes in contemporary works by Mexican and Latin American artists. Galería de Ollas, Av. Corona #176, carries the exquisite work of potters from the village of Mata Ortiz.

A cluster of galleries near the corner of Leona Vicario and Guadalupe Sánchez includes Corsica Galería de Arte, at Guadalupe Sánchez #756. Favored by serious collectors, it specializes in museum-quality work by bigleague Mexican artists. Unless you flew to PV on a private jet, sky-high prices will relegate you to browsing only. Phone (322) 222-9620.

South of the Río Cuale, Galleria Dante, Basilio Badillo #269, should be on every gallery hound's short list. Vallarta's largest (and many claim its best) gallery, Dante features a sculpture garden filled with contemporary pieces by international artists, plus high-quality re-creations of classical statues. The painters represented are primarily Mexican. More galleries, boutiques and jewelry shops line Basilio Badillo all the way down to the beach.

Downtown shops carry an excellent selection of home décor. Prices tend to be high, but so does quality. The warehouse-like Mundo de Cristal, south of the river at Insurgentes #333 (at the corner of Basilio Badillo) is the place to go for all things glass—from plates, stemware and vases to art glass hand-blown on site.

Mundo de Azulejos (World of Tiles), Venustiano Carranza #374 (also south of the river), has a huge selection of hand-painted Talavera tiles, as well as plates and murals. On display at Alfareria Tlaquepaque, Av. México #1100 (just off the *malecón*), are baskets, woodcarvings, glassware and ceramics from various Mexican states.

Huichol (pronounced we-CHOL) bead and yarn art is hand-crafted by Huichol Indians, who live in the Sierra Madre Mountains not far from Puerto Vallarta. Shamanistic traditions and peyote-fueled visions inspire the Huichol to create colorful yarn "paintings." Threads of yarn are pressed into a wax-coated wood tablet to create mythological imagery. The same general process is employed when using tiny, colored beads to decorate wooden animal figures with psychedelic patterns.

A good place to learn more about the animistic Huichol and the symbolism reflected in their art is the Folklore Bazaar, Paseo Díaz Ordaz #732 (on the malecón). Deer, snake, wolf, jaguar and iguana figures fill the shelves. Larger items can cost hundreds of dollars, but smaller pieces can be had for about \$20 (U.S.). Huichol artisans demonstrate their craft at a worktable in the center of the gallery. There's another location at Calle Olas Altas #433 in Old Town Vallarta.

Puerto Vallarta's shopping centers feature boutiques offering sportswear and casual yet fashionable evening wear. They are located primarily along the malecón and north into the Hotel Zone. Most stores are open until at least 8 p.m., and some may close from 2-4 for siesta. Many stores are closed on Sunday.

Among the arcades with browsing potential are Plaza Malecón, on the oceanfront at Paseo Díaz Ordaz and Calle Allende; Plaza Marina, within the Marina Vallarta complex; and Villa Vallarta, on Avenida Francisco Medina Ascencio in the Hotel Zone. Just north of the cruise ship terminal and Walmart, the sleek Galerias Vallarta mall is anchored by Mexican department store Liverpool (think Nordstrom).

Worlds removed from the hustle and bustle of downtown, the relaxed Marina Vallarta boardwalk caters to tourists staying in the Marina Vallarta resort area. Yachts glisten in the sun, couples stroll hand in hand along the water's edge and families dine al fresco at gringo-friendly eateries. Roving souvenir vendors are nonexistent.

Finding the boardwalk can be tricky, as it's hidden behind a string of condominium developments. From the marina's main thoroughfare, Paseo de la Marina, access is via calles Timón, Ancla or Vera. Restaurants outnumber retail establishments, but there are a handful of shops, clothing boutiques and galleries worth investigating.

A small flea market offering the usual T-shirts and souvenirs sets up at the Maritime Terminal docks where the cruise ships anchor. And finally, swarms of vendors peddle their wares at all Vallarta beaches, especially Playa de los Muertos. Their persistence can be annoying. so if you're not interested in purchasing anything, shake your head "no," say "Gracias, no" or ignore them completely. Also be aware that if you eat at one of the palapa restaurants fronting the beach boardwalk, vendors will approach constantly; if this bothers you ask for an inside table away from the front row action.

#### **Beaches**

Beaches are divided into three zones: north of town, in town and south of town. In summer there are efforts at all of the beaches to protect the eggs of endangered sea turtles, evidence of an increased ecological awareness throughout the country. Puerto Vallarta's sea turtle release programs involve regular patrols of turtle nesting grounds. Eggs are taken to protected nurseries, and hatchlings are released in the open water.

**PLAYA DE ORO** is n. of downtown, backed by the Hotel Zone. Although it may seem like the stretches of sand in front of the big hotels are private, they are not; all beaches in Mexico are federal property and thus open to the public. The wide, flat beach is divided into sections by rocky jetties and faces the open bay; waves can be surprisingly rough.

PLAYA DE LOS MUERTOS (Beach of the Dead) is s. of the Río Cuale and can be accessed from Calle Olas Altas. City officials have long tried to rename this popular beach Playa del Sol. Better for sunning than for swimming (the water is somewhat polluted), Playa de los Muertos attracts locals, European tourists and budget travelers. Sunbathers crowd the sand (particularly on Sundays and holidays), parasailers soar above it and roaming vendors hawk barbecued fish on a stick—the PV equivalent of a Coney Island hot dog. At the southern end of the beach is El Púlpito, a rock formation shaped like a pulpit.

PLAYA MISMALOYA (Mismaloya Beach) is about 10 km (6 mi.) s. of town off Mex. 200 (the southward extension of Av. Insurgentes). "The Night of the Iguana" was filmed here. A walking path along the southern end of a pretty cove leads to the ruins of the movie set, most of it surrounded by chain-link fencing hung with signs warning visitors to stay out.

Although the spot's tranquil beauty has been compromised by hillside home development and the sprawling La Jolla de Mismaloya hotel complex, the water is clear, the sand white and the beach backed by jungle-cloaked hills. A string of shoreline *palapa* restaurants sell beer and seafood, and also rent out tables and beach chairs. At the far southern end of the beach. Teos Restaurant & Bar serves delicious jumbo shrimp wrapped in greasy bacon and drizzled with pineapple juice. In the rugged country above Mismaloya another movie was made—Arnold Schwarzenegger's 1987 action opus "Predator."

#### Sightseeing

Nearby beaches and islands make easy day trip destinations from Puerto Vallarta, and eco-tourism activities allow participants to explore or learn about the local environment without disturbing it. Vallarta Adventures organizes a variety of sightseeing and eco tours; phone (322) 226-8413, or (888) 526-2238 (from the United States).

Among the fun things to do with friends is an all-day catamaran tour departing Puerto Vallarta's Maritime Terminal, which cruises the coast, stops for snorkeling off Playa Majahuitas and spends between 2 and 3 hours (although often longer) at Playa Yelapa, a beach that is only accessible by boat. Jungle-cloaked hills surround the small bay, and a half-dozen palapa restaurants line the coarse-sand beach. For dessert, Yelapa's roaming "pie ladies" sell slices from lemon meringue and pecan pies that they balance on their heads.

Yelapa itself is reached by a short water taxi ride from the main beach. You won't see any cars on the steep, sandy streets of this tiny pueblo. A 10-minute walk along the Yelapa River leads to a 150-foot-high waterfall. There are rustic accommodations if you want to stay the night and catch a water taxi back to Puerto Vallarta in the morning. Reservations for the catamaran trip can be made at most in-town tour booths.

#### Recreation

The Bay of Banderas extends north to Punta de Mita (Mita Point) and south to Cabo Corrientes (Corrientes Cape), where the foothills of the Sierra de Cuale range begin. Water depths of up to 1,500 feet make the bay almost like an ocean, but it also is protected due to its shape and the surrounding geography. The result is generally calm water, clear visibility and ideal conditions for **boating**.

A favorite **snorkeling** destination is the underwater park at Los Arcos (also called Las Peñas), a short distance offshore from Mismaloya Beach. The oddly eroded formations jutting out of the bay served as an early landmark for ships. Colorful marine life is particularly evident around these rocks.

Kayakers and experienced divers head for the Marietas Islands (Islas Marietas), off Punta de Mita at the bay's northern end. Tropical fish thrive here, dolphins are frequently sighted, and the islands also are a protected bird sanctuary. Chico's Dive Shop, Paseo Díaz Ordaz #772 at the northern end of the *malecón*, rents equipment and organizes dive trips to the Marietas; phone (322) 222-1895.

**Sport fishing** charters can be booked through your hotel or a travel agent. Rates depend on the size of the boat, where you fish, and whether bait and tackle are supplied. Bring your own refreshments, since most trips don't include them.

Sailfish and blue marlin are normally hooked November through February; smaller game species such as dorado, roosterfish and tuna can be caught seasonally most of the year. A catch-and-release policy is stressed if the fish is not going to be eaten.

Marina Vallarta has more than 500 slips and offers boaters fresh water, as well as cable TV and telephone hookups. Hardware and boating supply outlets are located along the boardwalk of this sprawling complex, which also has an 18-hole golf course, luxury hotels and condominiums. Tour boats and fishing excursions depart from the marina's Maritime Terminal. Boaters can explore a variety of tiny coves and hidden beaches along the shore of Banderas Bay, or drop anchor for awhile off the coast in Nuevo Vallarta.

Swimming, water skiing and parasailing are some of the many fun things to do outdoors at many spots along the bay. Surfers head for the open waters and bigger waves around Punta de Mita. For those who would rather view the bay than venture into it, a shoreline horseback ride can be arranged through a travel agent.

Rancho El Charro organizes guided 2- to 3-hour horseback riding excursions into the foothills of the Sierra Madre, past jungle plantations and rural villages. Transportation is included and reservations are necessary; phone (322) 224-0114 or (322) 294-1689 for Rancho El Charro.

There are several 18-hole **golf** courses in the area. Water comes into play on 11 holes at the Marina Vallarta Club de Golf course. Member privileges are extended to guests staying at certain hotels. Greens fees range from \$78 to \$142 (U.S.) and include a shared cart. Golfers wishing to play outside peak tourist season should check with the club; phone (322) 221-0073.

The Flamingos Golf Club is about 13 kilometers (8) miles) north of the airport off Mex. 200, in the state of Nayarit. Greens fees (shared cart and a bottle of water included) at this older, par-72 course range from about \$49 to \$113; caddies are available. (Note: Nayarit observes Mountain Standard Time, which is an hour earlier than

Puerto Vallarta and the rest of Jalisco.) Reservations and transportation can be arranged through your hotel, or phone (329) 296-5006.

The Vista Vallarta Club de Golf, 653 Circuito Universidad, Colonia San Nicolas, is about 3 miles inland from Marina Vallarta. There are two courses, one designed by Jack Nicklaus and one by Tom Weiskopf. Greens fees (motorized cart included) range from around \$110-\$210 (U.S.). For tee times and hotel package information phone (322) 290-0030.

Most of the resorts provide clay tennis courts for their guests. PV also has two tennis centers: the Canto del Sol Tennis Club in the Hotel Zone; and the Los Tules Tennis Center, near the Fiesta Americana Hotel.

#### Nightlife

Among the cheapest things to do after dark is a stroll along the *malecón* (Paseo Díaz Ordaz). Sunday evenings in particular bring out local families, mariachi bands, street performers and the ubiquitous vendors.

The loud, flashy nightclubs along the malecón tend to attract younger crowds. Hip-hop booms at Mandala Puerto Vallarta, Paseo Díaz Ordaz #644. This sleek, partially open-air dance club has flat-screen TVs playing the latest hip-hop videos and a giant Medusa statue towering over the bar. Next door, techno pulses in the cave-like Zoo Bar, a safari-themed club complete with a bouncer in a gorilla suit and an elevated "dance cage." There's more revelry at La Vaguita, Paseo Díaz Ordaz #610.

These and other clubs usually stay open into the wee hours, and often until dawn during spring break weeks. Dress codes aren't strict, but don't show up in your soggy swim trunks and flip-flops. There's usually no cover charge; however, drink prices are steep.

Puerto Vallarta also has American-style sports bars where you can grab a bite to eat, play a board game, watch sports on TV or just sit and chat. El Torito Sports Bar & BBQ House, Av. Ignacio L. Vallarta #290, features satellite broadcasts of sports events and a casual menu with the likes of nachos, ribs and beer-battered shrimp. Steve's Sports Bar & Grill, at Basilio Badillo #286 (across the street from Memo's Pancake House), is a casual sports pub frequented by local expats and NASCAR, NHL and NFL enthusiasts.

As for romantic things to do, couples can catch a live jazz combo at Le Bistro Jazz Cafe, a stylish supper club at the eastern end of Isla Río Cuale. Mexican-style fiestas with dinner buffets, folk dancing and live music take place at big hotels like the Krystal Puerto Vallarta and the Sheraton Buganvilias Resort & Convention Center. For schedule and reservation information, check with the hotels or a local travel agency.

Pirates of the Bay sets sail nightly on a 4-hour dinner cruise and pirate show. Passage on the replica pirate ship includes live entertainment, a buffet meal, open bar, dancing and a fireworks display launched from the boat. Cruises depart the Maritime Terminal daily at 7 p.m. (and on a reduced schedule during low season). The fee for adults is \$120 (U.S.). A more family-friendly version of the cruise is available Mon.-Sat. mornings at 10 a.m. Make reservations through your hotel, or phone 01 (800) 099-0237 (toll-free long distance within Mexico) or (855) 530-5733 (toll-free from the United States and Canada).

#### Special Events

Puerto Vallarta's biggest events occur during high tourist season. The Festival of the Sea (Fiesta del Mar), the International Sailfish & Marlin Tournament and Festival Gourmet International Vallarta, a food and wine event that spotlights the expertise of Mexican and international guest chefs, all take place in November. For specific

dates and details so you can time your vacation accordingly, contact the Municipal Tourist Office.

The patron saint of mariachis is honored Nov. 23 during the Festival of Santa Cecilia, when a lineup of mariachi bands plays at the Church of Our Lady of Guadalupe. In March, the San Diego to Vallarta Yacht Race brings some impressive watercraft to Marina Vallarta.

The year's biggest national celebration is the Fiesta de Guadalupe, honoring the Virgin of Guadalupe, Mexico's patron saint. Evening processions, called peregrinaciones, make their way to the Church of Our Lady of Guadalupe from various colonias (neighborhoods) and local businesses the week prior to Dec. 12. Young and old alike participate in the celebration, many carrying candles or offerings of food and flowers to be exchanged for a blessing by the priest. Mass is held in front of the cathedral, accompanied by dancing and singing. The festivities culminate on Dec. 12 with a grand fireworks display.

#### PUERTO VALLARTA, JALISCO

# BARCELO PUERTO VALLARTA BOOK NOW 322/226-0660



Resort Hotel. Address: Zona Hotelera Sur KM 115 No 4900 48390. Location: Oceanfront. Facility: This all-inclusive resort is loaded with recreational activities and guest room amenities. You'll also find a great view of Los Arcos, and live shows each evening. 316 units, some two bedrooms. 9 stories, exterior corridors. Amenities: safes. Dining: 5 restaurants, entertainment. Pool: heated outdoor. Activities: hot tub. steamroom, beach on-site, fishing, scuba diving, snorkeling, tennis, recreation programs, kids club, playground, game room, health club, spa. Guest Services: valet laundry.



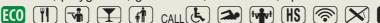
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# BUENAVENTURA GRAND HOTEL & GREAT MOMENTS BOOK NOW 322/226-7000



Resort Hotel. Address: Ave Mexico 1301, Col 5 de Diciembre 48350. Location: Oceanfront. Facility: This busy all-inclusive hotel is close to the bustle of the town, yet on the outskirts. Rooms have comfortable décor and modern amenities. 233 units. 4-5 stories, interior corridors. Bath: shower only. Parking: on-site and street. Amenities: safes. Dining: 3 restaurants, entertainment. Pool: heated outdoor. Activities: hot tub, recreation programs, kids club, exercise room, spa. Guest Services: valet laundry.







CASA DONA SUSANA BOOK NOW 322/226-7100



Boutique Hotel. Address: Manuel M Dieguez No 171 48380.



CASA IGUANA HOTEL DE MISMALOYA BOOK NOW

322/228-0786



Hotel. **Address:** Ave 5 de Mayo No 455.





Boutique Hotel. Address: 445 Zaragoza 48300. Facility: The former homes belonging to Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton have been beautifully converted into nine elegant rooms. The bridge connecting the two homes remains and leads to the pool. 9 units. 5 stories, interior corridors. Parking: street only. Terms: age restrictions may apply. Amenities: safes. Dining: The Iguana, see separate listing. Pool: heated outdoor. Activities: massage. Guest Services: valet laundry.













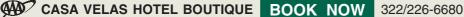














Boutique Resort Hotel. Address: 311 Pelicanos Marina Vallarta 48354. Facility: This gated resort features private villas or spacious quest rooms, many with a private dip pool and views of the adjoining golf course. It is adults only all-inclusive. 80 units. 2-4 stories, interior/exterior corridors. Parking: on-site and valet. Terms: age restrictions may apply. Amenities: safes. Dining: Emiliano, see separate listing. Pool: heated outdoor. Activities: sauna, hot tub, steamroom, recreation programs, exercise room, spa. Guest **Services:** valet laundry, area transportation.





























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322/226-7979





AAA Benefit: Members save 10% or more and earn Choice Privileges points when booking AAA/CAA rates!

Hotel. Address: Blvd Francisco Medina Ascencio No 3965 48335. Facility: 121 units, some two bedrooms. 5 stories, interior corridors. Bath: shower only. Amenities: safes. Pool: outdoor.

























COSTA SUR RESORT & SPA

**BOOK NOW** 322/226-8050



Hotel. Address: Carr Barra de Navidad KM 45 48390.



CROWN PARADISE CLUB BOOK NOW 322/226-6868



Resort Hotel. Address: Ave Las Garzas No 1 48333. Location: Oceanfront. Facility: This family-oriented property offers an outstanding program for children with an extensive kids club, special menus in the restaurants and an active pool area. Some rooms have bunk beds. 353 units. 4 stories, exterior corridors. Amenities: safes. Dining: 4 restaurants, nightclub, entertainment. Pool: outdoor. Activities: hot tub, scuba diving, snorkeling, tennis, recreation programs, kids club, playground, game room, exercise room, spa. Guest Services: valet laundry.





























CROWN PARADISE GOLDEN-ADULTS ALL INCLUSIVE BOOK NOW



Resort Hotel. Address: Paseo de Las Garzas No 3 48333. Location: Oceanfront. Facility: This all-inclusive, adults-only resort on a lovely stretch of beach welcomes quests who are 18 and over; rooms are spacious and well appointed featuring a contemporary Mexican design. 299 units. 7-8 stories, exterior corridors. Terms: age restrictions may apply. Amenities: safes. Dining: 4 restaurants, nightclub, entertainment. Pool: outdoor. Activities: hot tub, beach on-site, scuba diving, snorkeling, tennis, recreation programs, health club, spa. Guest Services: valet laundry.























DREAMS VALLARTA BAY BOOK NOW 322/226-2840

FOUR DIAMOND INSPECTED @ CLEAN

AAA Benefit: Members save up to 10% and earn World of Hyatt points when booking AAA/CAA rates!

SAVE Resort Hotel. Address: David Alfaro Siqueiros No 164 48333.

FIESTA AMERICANA PUERTO VALLARTA ALL INCLUSIVE **BOOK NOW** 322/226-2100

Resort Hotel, Address: Blvd Fco Medina Ascencio KM 25 48333.

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FOUR DIAMOND

THREE DIAMOND INSPECTED 🎯 CLEAN

INSPECTED @ CLEAN

FOUR DIAMOND INSPECTED @ CLEAN

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FIESTA INN PUERTO VALLARTA ISLA **BOOK NOW** 322/688-1550

Hotel. Address: 2479 Francisco Medina Ascencio Blvd 48333.

FRIENDLY FUN VALLARTA BOOK NOW 322/226-4600

Resort Hotel. Address: KM 25 Blvd Fco Medina Ascencio 2199 48333. THREE DIAMOND

GARZA BLANCA PRESERVE, RESORT & SPA **BOOK NOW** 322/176-0700

Resort Hotel. Address: KM 75 Carr a Barra de Navidad.

GRAND MIRAMAR ALL LUXURY SUITES & RESIDENCES **BOOK NOW** 322/226-2520

Hotel. Address: Paseo de Los Corales 139 48390.

HACIENDA BUENAVENTURA HOTEL & MEXICAN CHARM **BOOK NOW** 322/226-6667

> Hotel. Address: Blvd Fco Medina Ascencio 2699 48300. Facility: 155 units. 2-4 stories (no elevator), interior corridors. Parking: on-site and street. Amenities: safes. Dining: 3 restaurants. Pool: heated outdoor. Activities: recreation programs, spa. Guest Services: valet laundry.

HACIENDA SAN ANGEL BOOK NOW 322/222-2692



Boutique Hotel, Address: Miramar 336 Col Centro 48300, Facility: Set high on a hill, this charming hidden treasure in the heart of Puerto Vallarta has luxurious rooms spread throughout a series of connected villas. 12 units. 2-3 stories (no elevator), interior/exterior corridors. Parking: street only. Terms: age restrictions may apply. Amenities: safes. Dining: Hacienda San Angel Gourmet, see separate listing. Pool: heated outdoor. Guest **Services:** valet laundry.





















HOLIDAY INN & SUITES PUERTO VALLARTA MARINA & GOLF

**BOOK NOW** 

322/252-0070

INSPECTED @ CLEAN

Hotel. Address: 3650 Blvd Francisco Medina Ascencio 48335.

HOLIDAY INN EXPRESS PUERTO VALLARTA BOOK NOW

322/226-7760



Hotel. Address: Blvd Francisco Medina Ascencio 3974.

HOTEL EL PESCADOR BOOK NOW 322/176-1100



Hotel. Address: Paraguay No 1117 Col S de Diciembre 48350.



HOTEL MOUSAI BOOK NOW

322/176-0710



Boutique Contemporary Hotel. Address: KM 75 Carretera a Barra de Navidad. Location: Oceanfront. Facility: This chic hotel, exclusively for adults, offers the ultimate in contemporary design in its rooms and public areas. Guests enjoy stunning hilltop views that offer both jungle and seaside vistas. Meets AAA quest room security requirements. 145 units. 17 stories, interior corridors. Bath: shower only. Parking: valet only. Terms: age restrictions may apply. Amenities: safes. Dining: 4 restaurants. Pool: heated outdoor. Activities: sauna, steamroom, beach on-site, scuba diving, snorkeling, recreation programs, trails, health club, spa. Guest Services: valet laundry.

























HOTEL ONE PUERTO VALLARTA AEROPUERTO **BOOK NOW** 322/176-1040



Hotel. Address: 3987 Blvd Francisco Medina Ascencio.



HOTEL ROSITA BOOK NOW

322/176-1111

**APPROVED** INSPECTED @ CLEAN Hotel. Address: Paseo Diaz Ordaz No 901 48300.

HYATT ZIVA PUERTO VALLARTA BOOK NOW 322/226-5000



HYATT ZIVA AAA Benefit: Members save up to 10% and earn World of Hyatt points when booking AAA/CAA rates!

Resort Hotel. Address: KM 35 Carr a Barra de Navidad. Location: Oceanfront. Facility: This luxurious all-inclusive resort boasts an excellent beachfront location with stunning views. Rooms are decorated in a chic Mexican style; some units have balcony hot tubs. 335 units. 12 stories, interior corridors. Bath: shower only. Amenities: safes. Dining: 5 restaurants, entertainment. Pool: heated outdoor. Activities: sauna, hot tub, steamroom, beach on-site, self-propelled boats, scuba diving, snorkeling, recreation programs, playground, health club. Guest Services: valet laundry.



























KRYSTAL GRAND PUERTO VALLARTA

**BOOK NOW** 

322/176-1176



Resort Hotel. Address: Ave de Las Garzas 136-1 48333.



KRYSTAL PUERTO VALLARTA BOOK NOW

322/226-0700

THREE DIAMOND INSPECTED @ CLEAN Resort Hotel. Address: Ave de Las Garzas S/N Zona Hotelera Norte 48333.



LAS PALMAS BY THE SEA BOOK NOW 322/226-1220

**APPROVED** INSPECTED @ CLEAN Resort Hotel. Address: 126 Calle Pablo Picasso 48333.



LOS ARCOS SUITES BOOK NOW

322/226-7100



Hotel. Address: Manuel M Dieguez No 164 48380.



Please refer to pages 10-11 for Inspected Clean details.



MARRIOTT PUERTO VALLARTA RESORT & SPA BOOK NOW 322/226-0000



AAA Benefit: Members save 5% or more and earn Marriott Bonvoy™ points when booking AAA/CAA rates!

SAVE Resort Hotel. Address: Paseo La Marina Norte 435 48354.



MELIA PUERTO VALLARTA BOOK NOW 322/226-3000



Resort Hotel. Address: Paseo de La Marina Sur Lote No 7 48354.



PLAYA LOS ARCOS HOTEL BEACH RESORT & SPA

**BOOK NOW** 

322/226-7100



Hotel. Address: Olas Altas 380 48380.



# PLAZA PELICANOS CLUB BEACH RESORT BOOK NOW 322/226-2700



Hotel. Address: Diego Rivera No 120 Zona Hotelera Las Glorias 48330. Facility: 200 units. 3 stories (no elevator), interior corridors. Parking: on-site and street. Terms: check-in 4 pm. Amenities: safes. Dining: 2 restaurants. Pool: outdoor, heated outdoor. Activities: tennis, recreation programs, kids club, massage. Guest Services: valet laundry. CALL (L) SS SS



### PLAZA PELICANOS GRAND BEACH RESORT BOOK NOW 322/226-2700



Hotel. Address: Jose Clemente Orozco 131 48330. Location: Oceanfront. Facility: 100 units. 3 stories, interior/exterior corridors. Parking: on-site and street. Terms: check-in 4 pm. Amenities: safes. Dining: 2 restaurants, entertainment. Pool: heated outdoor. Activities: scuba diving, snorkeling, recreation programs, kids club, game room, exercise room, spa. Guest Services: valet laundry.



























**BOOK NOW** 

322/226-2900



AAA Benefit: Members save up to 10% and earn World of Hyatt points when booking AAA/CAA rates!

SAVE Contemporary Resort Hotel. Address: David Alfaro Siqueiros No 164 48333.

### SHERATON BUGANVILIAS RESORT & CONVENTION CENTER BOOK NOW



322/226-0404





### AAA Benefit: Members save 5% or more and earn Marriott Bonvoy<sup>™</sup> points when booking AAA/CAA rates!

SHERATON Resort Hotel. Address: Blvd Francisco Medina Ascencio 999 48333.

Location: Oceanfront. Facility: This oceanfront complex is within walking distance of El Centro, PV's old downtown area. The two large pools feature swim-up bars. Ask for an upper-floor room if you want a great view. 473 units. 13 stories, interior corridors. Bath: shower only. Amenities: safes. Dining: 5 restaurants, also, Gaviotas, La Villita, see separate listings. **Pool:** heated outdoor. **Activities:** beach on-site, tennis, recreation programs, kids club, health club, spa. Guest Services: valet laundry.































### SUNSCAPE PUERTO VALLARTA RESORT & SPA BOOK NOW 322/226-1700





### AAA Benefit: Members save up to 10% and earn World of Hyatt points when booking AAA/CAA rates!

SUNSCAPE Hotel. Address: 2465 Blvd Fco Medina Ascencio S/N KM 35 48300.

Location: Oceanfront. Facility: 340 units. 9-18 stories, interior corridors. Bath: shower only. Amenities: safes. Dining: 4 restaurants, entertainment. Pool: heated outdoor. Activities: tennis, recreation programs, kids club, exercise room, massage. Guest Services: valet laundry.





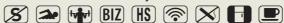
















Boutique Resort Hotel. Address: Diego Rivera No 121, Zona Hotelera Las Glorias 48330. Location: Oceanfront. Facility: Simultaneously chic and family-friendly, this beachfront property has a relaxing adults' pool, a family pool, a vibrant kids club and a raised sun deck with three outdoor hot tubs. 106 units, some kitchens. 15 stories, interior corridors. Amenities: safes. Dining: 3 restaurants. Pool: heated outdoor. Activities: hot tub, beach on-site, tennis, recreation programs, kids club, playground, exercise room, spa. Guest







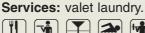


# SUNSET PLAZA BEACH RESORT & SPA BOOK NOW 322/226-2757



































VELAS VALLARTA SUITE RESORT & CONVENTION CENTER **BOOK NOW** 322/226-9500

INSPECTED @ CLEAN

Resort Hotel. Address: Ave Costera 585 S/N LH-2 Marina Vallarta 48354.



INSPECTED @ CLEAN

Hotel, Address: Blvd Fco Medina Ascencio KM 25 48300.

#### VILLA PREMIERE BOUTIQUE HOTEL & ROMANTIC GETAWAY BOOK NOW 322/226-7040



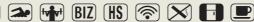
Hotel. Address: San Salvador 117, Col 5 Diciembre 48350. Location: Oceanfront. Facility: This luxurious hotel offers highly personalized service and is adult oriented. Upon arrival, quests are welcomed with a complimentary beverage and an instantly relaxing neck massage. 80 units. 7 stories, interior corridors. Parking: on-site and valet. Terms: age restrictions may apply. Amenities: safes. Dining: 3 restaurants. Pool: heated outdoor. Activities: sauna, steamroom, beach on-site, self-propelled boats, health club, spa. Guest Services: valet laundry.



























AAA Benefit: Members save 5% or more and earn Marriott Bonvoy™ points when booking AAA/CAA rates!

SAVE Resort Hotel. Address: Paseo de La Marina Sur No 205 Marina Vallarta 48354.

#### WHERE TO EAT

# **CAFÉ DES ARTISTES** 322/226-7200



French Fine Dining. **Expert Advice:** Classic. Guests can choose to dine in the elegant, air-conditioned dining room or the open-air, upper-level garden patio to enjoy the night breeze. Fine live music filters through to both areas as well as the upscale lounge. The menu features a mix of local and regional specialties and is ever-changing to reflect the best of the season. The prawn pumpkin cream is a favorite, as are the duck tacos. A full chef's tasting menu is also featured and highly recommended. Features: full bar, patio dining. Reservations: required. Address: Guadalupe Sanchez 740 48300.





International Fine Dining. Expert Advice: Guests enter through secured gates and graceful lobby of the hotel before being awed by cascading waters leading to a midnight blue pool, which will be the backdrop for an enjoyable meal. Menu options might include sweet plantain and black bean turnover in a sweet cream sauce, a salad of tender lobster and sliced pineapple in a citric vinaigrette or maybe beef medallions in a blue agave sauce with cracked black pepper. Phone ahead to check the changing specialty menu, featuring varied cuisine. Features: full bar, patio dining. Reservations: required, for non-hotel guests. Address: 311 Pelicanos Marina Vallarta 48354. Parking: valet only.





#### **GAVIOTAS** 322/226-0404



Mexican Fine Dining. Expert Advice: Come prepared to be dazzled by highly innovative contemporary Mexican cuisine with outstanding presentations. The chef has prepared a comprehensive menu that changes to reflect the best of the season. Selections may include pumpkin and shrimp chowder, Pork belly with guava purée or Beef steak with chocolate and cheese curds. Desserts range from traditional to exotic. Features: full bar, patio dining. Reservations: required. Semiformal attire. Address: Blvd Francisco Medina Ascencio 999 48333.



#### HACIENDA SAN ANGEL GOURMET 322/222-2692



International Fine Dining. Address: Miramar 336 Col Centro 48300.



#### THE IGUANA 322/222-1336



Mexican Fine Dining. Address: 445 Zaragoza 48300.

### A VILLITA 322/226-0404



International Casual Dining. Expert Advice: Open all day, this covered open-air restaurant is known throughout the area for its wonderful Sunday brunch buffet, complete with mariachi players. The rest of the week, this place remains equally enjoyable but quieter. Buffets are featured and a varied a la carte lunch and dinner menu featuring lighter fare such as burgers, sandwiches and entrée salads. Nice sea breezes cool this close-to-the-ocean retreat. Features: patio dining, Sunday brunch. Address: Blvd Francisco Medina Ascencio 999 48333.

#### **PUNTA DE MITA, NAYARIT**







Bed & Breakfast. Address: Calle Playa Caneveras S/N.



CONRAD PUNTA DE MITA BOOK NOW 329/298-4300







CONRAD AAA Benefit: Members save up to 10% and earn Honors points when booking AAA/CAA rates!

Hotel. Address: Carretera Punta de Mita, Sayulita KM 2 63734. Facility: Set on a long stretch of pristine beach, this luxurious resort is distinctly Mexican in design. A series or tropical pools, an upscale spa and a tantalizing selection of dining tempt vacationers. 324 units, some two bedrooms and efficiencies. 3-6 stories, interior corridors. Parking: on-site and valet. Amenities: safes. Dining: 4 restaurants. Pool: outdoor. Activities: sauna, hot tub, steamroom, recreation programs in season, exercise room. Guest Services: valet laundry.



































DREAMS BAHIA MITA SURF & SPA BOOK NOW 329/689-0400





AAA Benefit: Members save up to 10% and earn World of Hyatt points when booking AAA/CAA rates!

Resort Hotel. Address: Carretera La Cruz de Huanacaxtle- Punta de Mita, #5 63734. Location: Oceanfront. Facility: This all-inclusive

family resort is set on a stunning stretch of beach and is very activity oriented with an extensive program both day and night. The luxurious rooms are large and feature balconies. 363 units. 5-7 stories, interior/exterior corridors. Parking: valet only. Amenities: safes. Dining: 4 restaurants, entertainment. Pool: outdoor, heated outdoor. Activities: sauna, hot tub, steamroom, beach on-site, cabanas, self-propelled boats, recreation programs, kids club, playground, health club, spa. Guest Services: valet laundry, rental car service.





































# FOUR SEASONS RESORT PUNTA MITA, MEXICO BOOK NOW 329/291-6000



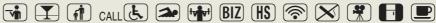
Resort Hotel. Address: Punta Mita Bahia de Banderas 63734. Location: Oceanfront. Facility: This exclusive resort overlooks the ocean and a beach. It caters to couples and families who enjoy outdoor activities rather than nightlife. The tropical grounds and landscaping are outstanding. Meets AAA guest room security requirements. 178 units. 1-3 stories (no elevator), exterior corridors. Parking: valet only. Amenities: video games, safes. Dining: 4 restaurants, also, Aramara, see separate listing, entertainment. Pool: heated outdoor. Activities: hot tub, steamroom, beach on-site, fishing, scuba diving, snorkeling, regulation golf, tennis, recreation programs, kids club, bicycles, playground, game room, health club, spa. Guest Services: complimentary and valet laundry, boarding pass kiosk.

































GRAND PALLADIUM VALLARTA RESORT AND SPA BOOK NOW 329/226-9900



Resort Hotel. Address: Costa Banderas KM 115.



# IBEROSTAR SELECTION PLAYA MITA BOOK NOW

329/298-4280



Resort Hotel. Address: Camino Ingreso a Litibu, Lote 15 63734. Location: Oceanfront. Facility: Located on an outstanding stretch of beach, this property offers many relaxing options. Sit by the ocean, lounge by the huge tropical pool or wander the extensive grounds. 451 units. 4 stories, exterior corridors. Parking: valet only. Amenities: safes. Dining: 5 restaurants, entertainment. Pool: heated outdoor. Activities: sauna, hot tub, steamroom, beach on-site, self-propelled boats, scuba diving, snorkeling, tennis, recreation programs, kids club, playground, game room, health club, spa. Guest Services: valet laundry.



























THE ST. REGIS PUNTA MITA RESORT BOOK NOW 329/291-5800



AAA Benefit: Members save 5% or more and earn Marriott Bonvoy™ points when booking AAA/CAA rates!

SAVE Resort Hotel. Address: Lote H-4 Cond Maestro Ramal Carr Federal 200 KM 195 63734.



SECRETS BAHIA MITA SURF & SPA BOOK NOW 329/689-0400





AAA Benefit: Members save up to 10% and earn World of Hyatt points when booking AAA/CAA rates!

Resort Hotel. Address: Carretera La Cruz de Huanacaxtle-Punta de Mita, #5 63734. Location: Oceanfront. Facility: This adult-only

all-inclusive resort features an wide range of dining options and a prime beach. A selection of fine tropical pools, both active and quiet and a luxurious spa, complete the package. 278 units. 5-7 stories, interior/exterior corridors. Parking: valet only. Terms: age restrictions may apply. Amenities: safes. Dining: 6 restaurants, entertainment. Pool: outdoor, heated outdoor. Activities: hot tub, steamroom, beach on-site, self-propelled boats, recreation programs, health club, spa. Guest Services: valet laundry, rental car service.

































FOUR DIAMOND

INSPECTED @ CLEAN





AAA Benefit: Members save 5% or more and earn Marriott Bonvoy™ points when booking AAA/CAA rates!

Contemporary Resort Hotel. Address: KM 85, Carretera Punta de Mita 63734. Location: Oceanfront. Facility: Developed in the jungle, this outstanding beachfront resort features a natural, tranquil setting by day and a hip club vibe by night. Guest rooms feature an innovative and fun décor. Meets AAA guest

room security requirements. 126 units. 1-2 stories (no elevator), exterior corridors. Parking: valet only. Amenities: safes. Dining: 7 restaurants. Pool: heated outdoor. Activities: hot tub, beach on-site, scuba diving, snorkeling, recreation programs, health club, spa. Guest Services: valet laundry.





























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#### WHERE TO EAT



ARAMARA 329/291-6000



Asian Fine Dining. Address: Punta Mita Bahia de Banderas 63734.



# TUNA BLANCA BY THIERRY BLOUET 329/291-5414



International Casual Dining. Expert Advice: Sophisticated yet relaxed, this trendy spot is very popular with locals who appreciate innovative cuisine. A cool sea breeze blows through the open-air beachfront dining area, where entertainment comes courtesy of a live pianist on some evenings and the sizzling culinary action in the exhibition kitchen. The menu features several course tasting menus, including one that is fully vegetarian. Diners will also find nice a la carte selections with the suckling pig taco being the favorite. Features: full bar, patio dining. Reservations: suggested. Address: Ave El Anclote No 7 63734. Parking: street only.

### ZIHUATANEJO, GUERRERO—

See Ixtapa/Zihuatanejo, Guerrero p. 274.



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All products not available at all locations.





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# **Mexico City and Vicinity**

loating on a lake bed a mile and a half high, Mexico City is, in a word, unique. This ancient land of the Aztecs is a thoroughly modern world capital, yet a city with roots deeply entrenched in its indigenous and colonial Spanish cultures. It is the oldest (more than 675 years) and second highest (7,350 feet) capital in North America, and one of the most populous cities in the world.

Distinguished colonial buildings fill Mexico City's historic center. More than 2,000 years of history unfurl at the city's wealth of museums and their collections of priceless artifacts. The world-famous Ballet Folklórico celebrates the

history of Mexican folk music and dance. If you are a gourmand on a culinary quest, the capital offers memorable gastronomic experiences. And ardent shoppers will find a treasure trove of brightly colored bargains.

Mexico City's neighborhoods are as varied as the city itself. Polanco is a small residential area filled with art galleries, hotels, restaurants and foreign embassies. The shopping malls and exclusive international boutiques along Presidente Masaryk, the main street, are Mexico City at its most chic. Condesa is a middle-class neighborhood filled with parks and lovely turn-of-the-20th-century

homes. San Angel and Coyoacán, two distinctive neighborhoods in the southern part of the city, reflect the Spanish colonial era in the form of venerable plazas, colorful markets and a vibrant sense of artistic expression. This is "old Mexico" at its most beguiling.

Sunday is the best time to visit Coyoacán, when it is the site of a lively street bazaar. City residents converge at Plaza Hidalgo against a heady backdrop of sights, colors and aromas. Vendors display their wares—clothing, jewelry, balloons, trinkets, plants, paintings, puppies, paper flowers, incense, carved figurines, housewares and myriad other items—in stalls or spread on the ground on blankets.

Side trips are a relatively short hop away. Perhaps the most impressive is Teotihuacán, easily reached from Mexico City. While it lacks the lush jungle backdrop of Palenque, in southern Mexico, Teotihuacán is the most monumentally scaled of all the country's archeological zones. The temple remains and two majestic pyramids rise from a flat, open plain, with little surrounding vegetation to obscure the view. The wide open spaces and aweinspiring ruins are the perfect antidote to the city's sometimes claustrophobic congestion.

AAA recommends that travelers consult U.S. State Department travel advisories when planning traveling abroad. Find this information at travel.state.gov/content/ passports/en/country/mexico.html.

### **CUERNAVACA, MORELOS**

Note: For current information about safety/security issues in Cuernavaca, refer to the U.S. State Department website (travel.state.gov).

The list of those who have owned summer homes in Mexico includes presidents, Aztec emperors, Hernando Cortés, Archduke Maximilian and his wife Carlota, Taxco "silver king" José de la Borda and any number of affluent Mexico City residents. And these homes all have one location in common: Cuernavaca (kwehr-nah-VAH-cah). The capital of Morelos is a city of mountain views, pastelcolored buildings with red-tiled roofs and gardens lush with tropical vegetation (although many are hidden behind high walls). Benevolent weather not only nourishes the greenery but provides Cuernavaca with the nickname "city of eternal spring."

At Mex. 95 and Avenida Fundadores a grand equestrian statue pays tribute to Emiliano Zapata, the leader of the Revolution of 1910. Zapata's battle cry of "Land and liberty, and death to the haciendados" struck at hacienda owners throughout the country. His Plan de Ayala, aimed at agrarian reform, was signed near Cuautla on Nov. 28,

1911. In 1914 Zapata briefly joined Pancho Villa in occupying Mexico City before returning to Cuernavaca to prevent its seizure by federal troops.

Plaza de Armas, the main square, is shaded by flowering trees and dotted with park benches. Both the plaza and adjoining Juárez Garden (Jardín Juárez) are pleasant spots to relax over coffee or enjoy a Sunday band concert. The plaza teems with vendors, especially on weekends when stalls set up selling handicrafts, jewelry, balloons and every conceivable kind of trinket.

The Flower Fair (Feria de la Flor), held the first week in April, is a colorful and aromatic event that features garden-themed exhibits and competitions as well as a sound-and-light show staged at the main plaza. This also is a good time to visit the Borda Gardens Cultural Center, which has special horticultural displays in honor of the fair.

Morelos State Tourism Office (Subsecretaría de Turismo): Av. Morelos Sur #187 (Mex. 95) in the Las Palmas neighborhood, south of the downtown plaza and the cathedral. Open Mon.-Fri. 8-7. **Phone:** (777) 314-3709 (English spoken).

CUAUHNAHUAC MUSEUM (Museo de Cuauhnáhuac) is downtown at Av. Francisco Leyva #100; it flanks the e. side of the main plaza. This museum with the tonguetwisting name (pronounced kwow-NAH-wak) is housed in the Cortés Palace (Palacio Cortés), the former home of the Spanish conqueror. It was built over the remains of a pyramid. Construction of the medieval-style stone fortress began in 1530, but its appearance has been considerably altered since then.

The museum's 26 rooms chronicle everything from the age of dinosaurs to Mexico's contemporary Indian cultures. There are pre-Hispanic and religious artifacts; an exhibit about sugar plantations; 18th-century paintings from New Spain; traditional 19th-century dance costumes; pottery dating from the ninth century; a hat and gun that belonged to Emiliano Zapata; and objects associated with Cortés. Diego Rivera murals donated by former U.S. Ambassador Dwight Morrow depict the conquest of Mexico, the War of Independence and the Mexican Revolution of 1910.

**Time:** Allow 1 hour minimum. **Phone:** (777) 312-8171. (GT)

LAKES OF ZEMPOALA NATIONAL PARK (Parque Nacional Lagunas de Zempoala) is about 22 km (14 mi.) n. on old Mex. 95 to the town of Huitzilac, then some 15 km (9 mi.) w. on a narrow, winding road to the park entrance. The seven lakes (lagos) comprising this national park— Zempoala, Compela, Tonatihagua, Quila, Hueyapan, La Seca and Ocoyotongo—lie about 9,500 feet above sea level.

The bracing scenery—lofty mountain peaks and thick stands of tall green pine trees—looks more like Oregon or Canada than it does Mexico. Some of the lakes are stocked with bass and trout, and simple roadside restaurants hawk the latter (known as trucha) grilled, fried and smoked. The park offers plenty of opportunities for boating, hiking, bicycling, camping and jet-skiing.

**Note:** Check the U.S. State Department's latest Mexico Travel Warning advisory before planning any trip to this area, which is experiencing ongoing drug-related crime and high insecurity. Do not drive after dark, as the access road is extremely winding.

ROBERT BRADY MUSEUM (Museo Robert Brady) is next to the cathedral at Calle Netzahualcóyotl #4. The museum occupies Casa de la Torre, the former home of American artist Robert Brady, a native Iowan who settled in Cuernavaca in 1960. Brady restored the 16th-century stone and adobe mansion, formerly a Franciscan convent.

Brady collected as well as created art, and the museum displays more than 1,300 pieces—everything from Balinese masks to Mexican colonial carvings. They adorn the shelves, walls and tables of 14 rooms, essentially as Brady left them. The bright yellow and deep red walls and exuberantly colorful artwork combine for a surreal effect. Also noteworthy are the hand-painted tiles covering the kitchen and bathrooms. Artists represented include Diego Rivera, Rufino Tamayo, Frida Kahlo, Milton Avery and Marsden Hartley.

Guided group tours in several languages, including English, are available by appointment. Time: Allow 2 hours minimum. **Phone:** (777) 318-8554.

XOCHICALCO RUINS are about 37 km (23 mi.) s.w. of Cuernavaca and can be reached from downtown Mexico City via two different routes. Take Av. Tlalpan s. to toll highway Mex. 95D and continue s. to the town of Xochitepec, following signs to Mex. highway 166 (Xochitepec exit); from that point, follow signs to Xochicalco. There is a 16-peso toll at the Xochitepec exit. The alternate route is to take Mex. 95D to the exit for the town of Alpuyeca (toll 52 pesos), then follow the paved road that winds n. about 8 km (5 mi.) to the ruins site, which sits atop a mountain.

In terms of sheer grandeur, Xochicalco (so-chee-KAHLcoh, which means "place of flowers" in the Náhuatl Indian language) rivals the more famous archeological zone of Teotihuacán. After Teotihuacán's fall Xochicalco became one of the leading urban centers of the central high plains. These white-stone ruins epitomize the Classic Period in Mesoamerican history, which lasted from about the second through the eighth centuries and produced Mexico's first noteworthy urban civilizations. Xochicalco was designated a World Heritage Site by UNESCO in 1999.

Upon entering, buy your ticket to the ruins at the site museum (Museo de Xochicalco). The well-labeled (in Spanish) exhibits feature pottery, carvings and artifacts that have been excavated, and there is also a diorama of the entire site. There are excellent views of the ruins from the museum grounds.

The Pyramid of the Plumed Serpent (Pirámide de Quetzalcóatl) is the dominant structure, with well-preserved bas-reliefs and traces of hieroglyphs representing dates and eclipse signs. Close by is the entrance to a mazelike tunnel ending at a stone-hewn, stepped chamber with a "telescope" orifice; the astrologer-priests of Xochicalco made corrections to their calendar by examining the heavens through this aperture. From Xochicalco's fortresslike location the sweeping vistas of the Valley of Cuernavaca are spectacular.

**Time:** Allow 2 hours minimum. **Phone:** (737) 374-3090. ( YY )



HOLIDAY INN CUERNAVACA

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777/362-0203



Hotel. Address: Blvd Diaz Ordaz #86 Acapantzingo 62440.



HOLIDAY INN EXPRESS & SUITES CUERNAVACA

**BOOK NOW** 777/310-5333



Hotel. Address: Avenida Morelos Sur 133 62050.

## HOTEL & SPA HACIENDA DE CORTES BOOK NOW 777/315-8844



Classic Historic Country Inn. Address: Plaza Kennedy No 90, Col Atlacomulco Jiutepec 62560. Facility: Founded in the mid-1500s and once a retreat for the aristocrats of New Spain, this former hacienda comprises beautiful gardens, unique quest rooms with buildings and some furnishings from the period. 55 units. 1-5 stories, interior/exterior corridors. Parking: on-site and valet. Amenities: safes. Dining: La Casona Restaurant, see separate listing. Pool: heated outdoor. Activities: sauna, hot tub, exercise room, spa. Guest Services: valet laundry.





## LAS MAÑANITAS HOTEL GARDEN RESTAURANT & SPA BOOK NOW

777/362-0000



INSPECTED @ CLEAN

Classic Historic Country Inn. Address: Ricardo Linares 107 Col Centro 62000. Facility: Lush gardens surround this colonial-style inn, and peacocks, flamingos and other exotic birds wander the grounds. Rooms are elegantly furnished; a few have a jetted tub and some have private patios. 25 units, some two bedrooms. 2 stories (no elevator), interior/ exterior corridors. Parking: valet only. Amenities: safes. Dining: Las Mañanitas Restaurant, see separate listing. Pool: heated outdoor. Activities: sauna, hot tub, steamroom, exercise room, spa. Guest Services: valet laundry.























### WHERE TO EAT



LA CASONA RESTAURANT 777/315-8844



Regional Mexican Casual Dining. Address: Plaza Kennedy No 90, Col Atlacomulco Jiutepec 62560.



LAS MAÑANITAS RESTAURANT 777/362-0019



Mexican Fine Dining. Address: Ricardo Linares 107 Col Centro 62000.

# IZTACCÍHUATL-POPOCATÉPETL NATIONAL PARK, MÉXICO

**Note:** For current information about safety/security issues in Iztaccíhuatl-Popocatépetl, refer to the U.S. State Department website (travel.state.gov).

Embracing the pass between Mexico's two most famous volcanoes, Iztaccíhuatl-Popocatépetl (shortened locally to Izta-Popo) National Park is about 83 kilometers (52 miles) east of Mexico City. Popocatépetl (po-po-kah-TEH-pet-el) and Iztaccíhuatl (iss-tah-SEE-hwat-el) together form the Valley of Mexico's eastern rim. The volcanoes are Mexico's second and third highest mountains, and although located in a tropical latitude, both are high enough to be perpetually snowcapped.

Iztaccíhuatl (The White Lady), which rises 17,343 feet, is dormant. The mountain got its name from the legend of Popo, a warrior, and Izta, an Aztec princess, who fell in love and were turned into mountains by the gods, so the story goes, after Popo was betrayed by one of his enemies. Supporting the tale is the shape of Iztaccíhuatl, which bears a superficial resemblance to a reclining female form.

Immense quantities of sulfur have been taken from the crater of 17,887-foot Popocatépetl (The Smoking Mountain); Hernando Cortés' soldiers used it to make gunpowder. Aztec runners made daily trips up the mountain to fetch ice for Emperor Moctezuma's drinks and to preserve fish. The last significant eruption occurred in 1802, but sporadic spewings of smoke, ash and glowing red rocks that resumed in the 1990s—and more recently in mid-2013—have resulted in evacuations.

The town of Amecameca, about 60 kilometers (37 miles) east of Mexico City via Mex. 190 and Mex. 115, lies at the foot of the national park at an elevation of about 7,500 feet. Although it doesn't offer much to do, there are views of Izta and Popo from the main plaza.

The Sanctuary of El Sacromonte (Santuario del Sacromonte) stands on a hill above Amecameca. From the arch on the southwest side of the plaza, walk about 2 blocks to the steps that ascend the hill to the sanctuary; the inspiring vistas en route are worth the effort.

To get to the park from downtown Amecameca, take Mex. 115 south to the Pemex gas station at the city's southern edge, then take the paved road east toward Tlamacas (watch for the highway sign). The narrow, two-lane blacktop passes through the town of San Pedro Nexapa; watch for the highway signs that say "Ruta de Acesso" (route access). The road ascends to the town of Paso de Cortés, where the main park office is located; this is where visitors check in. The office has wall-mounted maps of the park.

Dirt and cobblestone hiking and bicycling trails branch out into various sections of the park, offering beautiful views of rugged mountains and thick pine forests. Interestingly, the terrace farms and fruit orchards in this region are more reminiscent of Europe than Mexico. Burnt-out land and lava flows are evidence of Popo's recent activity, and the mountain remains off limits to the public.

**Note:** Military checkpoints may be encountered. Watch for electric cattle fences that are scattered throughout the park. Picnicking is permitted. Allow 2 hours minimum. For information phone (597) 978-3829 (Spanish only spoken).





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# **Mexico City**

City Population: 9,209,944 Elevation: 2,240 meters (7,347 feet)

### **Editor's Picks:**

Metropolitan Cathedral	(see p.	337)
National Museum of Anthropology	(see p.	342)
Palace of Fine Arts	(see p.	339)

## **GOOD FACTS TO KNOW**

#### WHOM TO CALL

Tourist Protection (Protección Legal al Turista): Secretaría de Turismo (SECTUR) headquarters, Presidente Masaryk #172; phone (55) 3002-6300 (English spoken). Persons needing legal assistance should contact this department at the Ministry of Tourism.

Police (emergency): Dial 060 and ask to be connected to an English-speaking operator if you need immediate assistance.

Police (non-emergency): In general, the police in Mexico City should be contacted only as a last resort. If your car is stolen, however, you must report it to the police, as you will be liable for any subsequent crimes in which the vehicle is involved.

U.S. Embassy: Paseo de la Reforma #305 (M: Sevilla or Insurgentes, line 1); phone (55) 5080-2000. The embassy is open for general business Mon.-Fri. 8:30-4:30: closed U.S. and Mexican holidays. There is a protection officer on 24hour duty to advise you in the event of robbery, assault, major loss, accident, illness or death; Mexican law takes precedence in such instances. Information regarding attorneys and translators also can be obtained.

Canadian Embassy: Calle Schiller #529, just north of the National Museum of Anthropology (M: Auditorio, line 7); phone (55) 5724-7900. Open Mon.-Fri. 8:30-5; closed Canadian and Mexican holidays.



**LOCATEL:** Phone (55) 5658-1111. This governmentoperated agency can help coordinate a search for missing persons or lost, stolen or towed vehicles; the hotline is answered daily 24 hours. The LOCATEL office is in the southern suburb of Churubusco at Calle Heroes del 47 #113, 3 blocks south of the National Museum of Interventions: phone (55) 5484-0400.

Consumer Protection Office: Contact the Consumer Protection Office (Procuraduría Federal del Consumidor, or PROFECO) if you feel that you've been cheated or ripped off regarding a service or purchase; phone (55) 5625-6700 or 01 (800) 468-8722 (toll-free long distance within Mexico).

**Hospitals:** The ABC Medical Center (Centro Médico ABC) is several blocks south of Chapultepec Park at Calle Sur #116, at Avenida Observatorio (M: Observatorio, line 1); phone (55) 5230-8000. All major credit cards are accepted. The Mexican Red Cross (Cruz Roja) is located at Calle Luis Vives #200, between Avenida Ejército Nacional and Avenida Homero (north of Chapultepec Park in the Polanco neighborhood). It is open 24 hours; phone (55) 1084-4505.

A list of doctors and hospitals in Mexico City is available from the U.S. Embassy, phone (55) 5080-2000, ext. 4780 (during working hours) and the Canadian Embassy (see phone number above). The British Embassy is at Rio Lerma #71 (2 blocks north of Paseo de la Reforma near the Sheraton María Isabel Hotel); phone (55) 1670-3200 Mon.-Thurs. 8-4:30, Fri. 8-2. Hotel front desks should also be able to provide information.

Local Phone Calls: All calls made from landlines are charged as local calls. Prior to Jan. 1, 2015, there was a separate price structure for long-distance calls (designated by the acronym LADA, or larga distancia). There also are no long-distance cellphone charges; dialing either a local cell number or a long-distance cell number from a landline is charged as a local call. Calls made to a cell number must include the prefix 044.

#### WHERE TO LOOK

#### **Publications**

The News is an English-language newspaper published Monday through Friday in Mexico City. Major U.S. newspapers are available at many newsstands the day after they are printed.

The American Bookstore, Calle Bolívar #23 near Avenida Francisco Madero (M: Allende, line 2), has U.S. newspapers and magazines, books and a selection of travel guides.

The Sanborns chain of restaurants also carries newspapers, magazines and books. There's a branch in the House of Tiles, Av. Madero #4 (M: Bellas Artes, lines 2 and 8).

Librería Porrúa is a Mexican publishing house that also has bookstores around the city. The flagship location, in the Centro Histórico at the corner of avenidas República de Argentina and Justo Sierra (M: Zócalo, line 2), is housed in a handsome

colonial-style building. Another publishing house, Fondo de Cultura Económica, operates a bookstore called Rosario Castellanos at Av. Tamaulipas #202 in trendy Colonia Condesa (M: Patriotismo, line 9). This skylit space is worth a visit for its cool design alone. In addition to a great selection of books (including a children's section) and DVDs, it offers free Wi-Fi and has a theater that shows indie films.

#### **Visitor Information**

Mexico Ministry of Tourism (Secretaría de Turismo, or SECTUR): Av. Presidente Masaryk #172 (ground floor), near the northeastern edge of Chapultepec Park in the Chapultepec Morales neighborhood (M: Polanco, line 7). Printed information can be obtained during office hours (Mon.-Fri. 8-6, Sat. 10-3). Phone: (55) 3002-6300, 1133.

Contact SECTUR 24 hours a day for answers in English to questions about tourist attractions, destinations and services. In Mexico City, phone (55) 5250-0123; elsewhere within Mexico, phone (800) 006-8839 (toll-free long distance).

Most of the big hotels offer internet access in their business centers. Java Chat, an internet cafe at Calle Génova #44 in the Zona Rosa (near Calle Hamburgo), is open daily until 11 p.m.; an hour of surfing costs about \$3 (U.S.).

#### WHAT TO KNOW

#### **Currency Exchange**

The rates charged by banks and casas de cambio (currency exchange houses) don't differ that much, so currency exchange is a matter of convenience. Most banks exchange currency Mon.-Fri. 9-noon, but you may have to wait in line; exchange houses often are open weekdays until 5 and may be open Saturdays as well. Exchange houses and ATMs are concentrated along Paseo de Reforma, in the Centro Histórico and in the Zona Rosa. The Sanborns chain of restaurants also provides ATMs.

Almost all ATMs take Visa and Mastercard; withdrawals are in pesos. Only use ATMs inside commercial establishments and be alert for suspicious behavior around the machine—criminals may target tourists withdrawing cash. Above all, do not make street transactions at night. Also be careful when leaving banks or exchange houses, which can be targeted by petty thieves.

#### **Staying Safe**

Street crime—from relatively benign offenses like pickpocketing and purse snatching to dangerous armed robbery—is an everpresent risk. No part of the city is immune, even the upscale Polanco neighborhood and other areas frequented by tourists. One way to avoid being mugged or robbed is not to wear expensive jewelry or watches.

Taxi robberies are among the most frequently reported crimes. For safety's sake, never hail a taxi on the street. While it will cost more, plan sightseeing, dinner or other excursions—even if only several blocks away and particularly if you're unfamiliar with your surroundings—through a designated driver affiliated with your hotel.

Petty crimes of opportunity often occur on Metro. If you choose to use the subway system, always be aware of what's going on around you, and make sure you know how to get to your destination.

Avoid participating in any demonstrations, strikes or other disputes that might be deemed political by Mexican authorities. Avoid the *Zócalo* and surrounding streets if protest activity is taking place. The Mexican Constitution prohibits foreigners from engaging in political activities; those who do may be detained and/or deported.

The sound of a steam whistle pierces the air, announcing the arrival of the camote man selling candied sweet potatoes from a street cart. At a mezcalería welldressed 20- and 30-somethings clink glasses before sipping *mezcal*, a smoky alcohol made from the agave plant. Mariachi bands serenade a crowd at historic Plaza Garibaldi, while commuters stuck in afternoon gridlock provide a steady chorus of impatient honks.

This is Mexico City. It's chaotic, cosmopolitan, cultured and alive. Mexico's capital city is crowded (more than 20 million people live in the metropolitan area) and sprawling, ranking alongside New York City, London and Bangkok in terms of eye-popping urban density. Its 16 municipalities and more than 300 colonias (neighborhoods) pulse with a never-ending hum of activity, promising more museums, restaurants, shopping markets, events and street carts than you'll ever have time for. One thing is for surewhether you're visiting for a weekend or a month, you're going to need an afternoon siesta or two to keep up with the frenzied pace.

The best way to get acquainted with Mexico City officially Ciudad de México, or "CDMX" for short—is to dive right in. A walk through the streets of the Centro Histórico (Historic Center) introduces many popular landmarks and travel sites: the towering Metropolitan Cathedral, built over a period of 250 years; the colonial-era National Palace and its breathtaking Diego Rivera murals; the partially unearthed Aztec ruins of the Great Temple; the gold-domed ₹ Palace of Fine Arts; and the people-packed Zócalo, a plaza built over the destroyed ceremonial center of the Aztec city of Tenochtitlan.

But that's not to say all of Mexico City's top attractions are old. One of the most visited art museums is the Soumaya Museum, showcasing the eclectic art collection of billionaire Carlos Slim. Opened in 2011, it's housed in a striking building covered in aluminum tiles. Contemporary works by renowned Mexican artists are highlights at the Wallseum of Modern Art and the Frida Kahlo Museum, where Frida Kahlo and muralist Diego Rivera lived and worked.

To fully experience the living, breathing Mexico City, though, venture into a neighborhood market. As Chilean poet Pablo Neruda once said, "Mexico is in its markets,"

and the capital city has more than 300 of them to explore. Wander the vendor stalls at Mercado de la Ciudadela to find pottery, handbags, colorful blankets and Day of the Dead decorations. Practice the art of bargaining near the Zócalo, where vendors shout over baskets of chili peppers and stacks of prickly cactuses. Browse local art at the Saturday bazaar in San Angel, or hunt for antique furniture and vintage clothing at La Lagunilla Market on Sunday afternoons.

Of course no visit to Mexico City is complete without a taste of traditional Mexican cuisine. Trendy places to eat in downtown's Zona Rosa, Condesa and Roma neighborhoods serve everything from regional specialties to new Mexican cuisine. *Puestos*, or street stands, are seemingly ubiquitous, with trucks, carts and bicycles selling fresh fruit cups, juices and tacos al pastor (thick strips of pork sliced off a spit and often topped with pineapple and cilantro). For adventurous eaters, chapulines (dried grasshoppers), escamoles (ant eggs) and other edible insects can be found at many places throughout the city.

Mexico City's sheer size can be overwhelming to the first-time visitor, but there are pleasant retreats amid the hubbub. Nearly double the size of New York City's Central Park, Chapultepec Park is a quiet sanctuary away from the cinderblock sprawl. In addition to a zoo, an amusement park and several world-famous museums, the grounds include Chapultepec Castle, a former presidential residence that now houses the National Museum of History.

The tree-lined streets of Condesa—a trendy neighborhood often compared to New York City's Greenwich Village or SoHo—boasts hipster-approved coffee shops, sidewalk bistros and a bohemian vibe. Leafy Parque México is delightfully well-kept and has plenty of benches. Families gather at the park on Sundays, when there are all sorts of arts and crafts activities for kids. But Condesa also draws crowds who congregate for a night out at one of the fashionable *cantinas* and bars, many of which are open until the wee hours.

Finally, a few words of advice. Like any big city, Mexico City has its issues with crime, traffic congestion and pollution. Stick to well-traveled areas and use common sense when venturing out after dark. If the very thought of attempting to drive the vehicle-clogged streets makes you nervous—and if you're hesitant to use Metro, the city's subway system—have someone else do the driving; many hotels maintain their own fleet of tourist taxis. Smog and pollution levels peak from mid-November through January, but the air tends to clear with the arrival of spring.

Pack a light jacket, brush up on your Spanish and make a mental note to stick to bottled water—Mexico City awaits.



#### **Historical Overview**

The Aztec people, like the Toltecs before them, migrated south over centuries. A band of Aztecs eventually ended up in the Valley of Mexico in 1168 to fulfill a priestly prophecy: They were destined to settle where an eagle, carrying a serpent in its beak, was perched on a cactus (an image that appears on the Mexican flag). According to legend that spot was on an island in the middle of Lake Texcoco. It was there that the Aztec capital of Tenochtitlan was founded.

The Aztecs soon controlled the riches of the Valley of Mexico, an important trade center, and by the end of the 15th century Tenochtitlan was a beautiful city of fountains, gardens and canals occupying the small islands that dotted the lake. Eventual land reclamation resulted in the creation of one large island, connected to the mainland by causeways. Tenochtitlan's population was about 300,000—possibly the world's largest city at its time. Then the Spanish arrived.

On Nov. 8, 1519, explorer Hernando Cortés became the first white man to enter Tenochtitlan's ceremonial center, today's Zócalo. Moctezuma II, the Aztec emperor, met Cortés with rich gifts and offered no resistance to his entry into the city. He believed the Spaniard to be a divine envoy of Quetzalcóatl, the fair-skinned, golden-haired god of civilization who according to legend was to return in the year of One Reed (Ce Acatl). On the Aztec calendar, 1519 was that year.

This case of mistaken identity brought about Moctezuma's downfall. Taking the ruler captive, Cortés and his troops remained in Tenochtitlan. After a long siege, a oncemighty city collapsed on Aug. 13, 1521. The Spaniards built their own city atop the ruins of the capital, leaving the outer periphery to the vanguished. Aztecs gradually intermingled with the Spanish, resulting in mestizos, persons of mixed Spanish and Indian blood who comprise the great majority of Mexico's present-day population.

Mexico City remained under Spanish rule for exactly 3 centuries, culminating in the decade-long fight for independence that followed Grito de Dolores, Father Miguel Hidalgo's impassioned speech advocating Mexican freedom, in 1810. It was finally taken by an army of patriots under Gen. Agustín de Iturbide, who entered the city on Sept. 27, 1821. Iturbide appointed himself emperor of the new nation in 1822 and was crowned in Mexico City as Agustín I, but his power was short lived; in December 1822 the republic was proclaimed and Iturbide was forced to abdicate.

During the 1860s the first *colonias*, or residential districts, began to appear. Modernization began on a large scale under the reign of dictator Porfirio Díaz from 1876 to 1910. Mexico City benefited from the establishment of such amenities as electric lighting, streetcars and a drainage system. The Palace of Fine Arts (Palacio de Bellas Artes) and other monumental public buildings were constructed, their design modeled after prevailing European neoclassic styles.

Modernization continued after adoption of the Constitution of 1917, bringing a steady stream of impoverished *mestizos* and Indians from the countryside. They crowded into working-class colonias, while luxurious residential districts housed the wealthy few. Skyscrapers began to define the city's skyline in the 1930s. The first sections of a modern subway system were completed in 1971; today Metro provides inexpensive public transportation to millions of people daily.

In the last half of the 20th century the metropolitan area expanded in all directions, absorbing formerly separate towns like Churubusco, Coyoacán, Iztapalapa, San Angel, Tlalpan, Villa de Guadalupe and Xochimilco. Today, greater Mexico City encompasses hundreds of *colonias* (residential neighborhoods).

### **Getting There**

### By Air

Benito Juárez International Airport is about 13 kilometers (8 miles) east of the *Zócalo*. Airlines offering direct international flights from U.S. cities include American, Delta, Southwest and United. Other airlines providing service to the airport include Air Canada and Alaska. Aeroméxico, (55) 5133-4000 or 01 (800) 021-4000 (toll-free long distance within Mexico), and low-cost Mexican carrier Volaris flies from multiple U.S. cities.

Two passenger terminals, Terminal 1 and Terminal 2, are at opposite sides of the airport and connected by a monorail that can only be accessed by passengers with a boarding pass, confirmed ticket or an e-ticket reference number. T1 handles most domestic flights; T2 handles most international flights. Phone (55) 2482-2400 for recorded information regarding Terminal 1, (55) 2598-7000 for recorded information regarding Terminal 2.

The first stop after arriving at the airport is Immigration, where an official will validate the FMM (Forma Migratoria Múltiple) tourist permit that you received and filled out during the flight. (This permit is sometimes referred to as a "landing card.") The next stop is baggage claim, where you will hand over your customs declaration form (if you're bringing anything that must be declared), and your bags will pass through an automated X-ray inspection.

In the arrivals hall you'll find Banamex and Bancomer bank branches, ATMs, cellphone rental and internet access companies, casas de cambio (currency exchange offices), a food court and a variety of gift and duty-free shops. Rental car agencies include Hertz.

Mexico City Hotel and Motel Association representatives (look for booths near the baggage claim area) can help you with booking a room at one of their member properties. Authorized baggage handlers are identified by the "Union" ID placard attached to their handcarts.

If you'll be flying to other cities within Mexico, make all flight arrangements prior to your departure. Contact your local AAA travel advisor for help finding cheap airline flights and travel packages.

Allow for sufficient travel time to the airport—a minimum of 45 minutes if you're based in the downtown area. Arrive at least an hour before departure for domestic flights, 2 hours before departure for international flights. If you have an early morning flight, a convenient place to stay is the Courtyard by Marriott Mexico City Airport; a pedestrian walkway connects it to level 2 of Terminal 1. For additional information about airlines see Arriving by Air, page p. 28.

Authorized airport taxis are the safest way to reach the downtown area from the airport. The yellow-and-white vehicles, sedans or minivans, have a black aircraft symbol on the door and are labeled "Transportación Terrestre" (Ground Transportation). Taxis require prepayment at the official airport taxi counter; look for the Taxi Autorizada booth in the baggage claim area. Rates are based on a zone system and



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vary according to distance; consult the map at the taxi counter to verify your destination. The fare to downtown Mexico City should not be more than 300 pesos.

Workers wearing yellow will escort you to an available taxi and give a voucher to the driver. Do not negotiate with anyone who approaches you with the offer of a ride into town. The ride to the city center takes 25 minutes to an hour, depending on the time of day. Tipping is customary if the driver helps with your luggage. Since negotiating for a taxi can be a hectic experience, it may be worth the effort to prebook a taxi prior to your arrival; services like Mexico Airport Transfers allow you to book a taxi from the airport online.

Metrobús buses run between the airport and downtown. Color-coded red buses (Line 4) depart from both terminals approximately every 20 minutes daily, 4:30 a.m.-midnight. The ride takes about 30 minutes and the fare is 30 pesos, plus 10 pesos for a prepaid Metrobús smart card. Bus drivers only accept the card as payment; the cards can be purchased in both terminals from vending machines that only accept Mexican pesos.

If you're traveling light you might consider using the Metro rapid transit system. Large pieces of luggage aren't allowed on board, however, and riding a crowded subway car weighed down with anything more than an overnight bag is not only cumbersome but unsafe. The airport station is Terminal Aérea (Air Terminal Building, line 5) on Boulevard Puerto Aéreo. The main terminal is within walking distance; follow the signs. To reach the downtown area from the airport, take the subway to the Pantitlán station and switch to line 1.

Note: At time of publication, Felipe Angeles International Airport was scheduled to open in March 2022, but only domestic airlines had announced flights.

### By Car

Mex. 15-D, 57/57-D and 85-D are the major highways approaching Mexico City from the west and north. From the south and east are Mex. 95-D and Mex. 150-D. Other routes are likely to be slow, winding or of substandard quality, and one—Mex. 134, which travels northeast to Mexico City from Mex. 200 along the Pacific Coast should be avoided entirely.

Leaving the city, the main thoroughfares are Avenida Insurgentes Sur, which becomes Mex. 95-D as it heads south to Cuernavaca, Taxco and Acapulco; running north, Avenida Insurgentes Norte becomes Mex. 85-D/85 heading toward Pachuca. The Periférico loops around the city's western and southern sides. It is called Avenida Avila Camacho within the city and becomes Mex. 57-D heading northwest toward Querétaro. Avenida Constituyentes runs west past Chapultepec Park and becomes

Mex. 15 as it heads toward Toluca; Calzada Ignacio Zaragoza leads east out of the city, becoming Mex. 190-D as it heads toward Puebla.

If you're driving in and out of the metropolitan area, try to time your arrival and departure times as early as possible to avoid getting stuck in the near-constant traffic.

**Note:** Seat belt use by the driver and all passengers is required within Mexico City.

### By Bus

With interconnections between Mexican and U.S. bus lines, it is possible to travel by bus from several U.S. border cities to Mexico City. Transportes del Norte, Tres Estrellas de Oro, Transportes Chihuahuenses and Omnibus de México are linked with Greyhound Lines Inc. From Tijuana it takes about 40 hours to reach Mexico City; from Ciudad Juárez, across the border from El Paso, Tex., about 24 hours; from Matamoros, across the border from Brownsville, Tex., about 14 hours.

Bus travel is available from Mexico City to nearly every town in the country, but reservations must be made. Most major Mexican lines offer first-class (lujo) bus service; these companies include Autobuses Cristóbal Colón, Autobuses del Oriente (ADO), ETN, Omnibus de México, Primera Plus and Tres Estrellas de Oro. Arrivals and departures at bus stations in Mexico are usually announced in Spanish only. For additional information about buses see Bus Service, page p. 36.

Mexico City has four main bus terminals that correspond to the four compass points. By far the largest of the four is the Terminal Central de Autobuses del Norte, Av. Cien Metros #4907 (M: Autobuses del Norte, line 5). Most of the buses traveling from the northern border arrive at this terminal, also known as "Terminal Norte" or "Camiones Norte." From here, buses travel to almost every destination north and west of the capital, including the Pacific Coast resorts from Manzanillo northward; inland cities such as Aguascalientes, Guadalajara, Guanajuato, Monterrey, Morelia, Querétaro and San Miguel de Allende; and the nearby archeological sites of Teotihuacán and Tula.

The terminal offers currency exchange services (during normal banking hours) and has a hotel reservations booth. Taxis charge standard fares based on a zone system; tickets are purchased at booths inside the station. Count your change carefully, as overcharging is common.

Terminal de Autobuses de Pasajeros de Oriente (TAPO) is at Calzada Ignacio Zaragoza #200, near the airport (M: San Lázaro, line 1). Buses travel to and from destinations to the east and south, including Jalapa, Puebla, Veracruz, Villahermosa, Oaxaca, San Cristóbal de Las Casas, Tuxtla Gutiérrez and cities on the Yucatán Peninsula.

There are taxi ticket booths and currency exchange services at the terminal.

Terminal Central de Autobuses del Sur is at Av. Taxqueña #1320 (M: Taxqueña, line 2). At the end of Metro's line 2, this also is a major terminus for local city buses from downtown and other points north. From here buses arrive and depart for Acapulco, Cuernavaca, Ixtapa/Zihuatanejo, Taxco and other points south and west of Mexico City. For day trips to nearby Cuernavaca, Cuautla and Tepoztlán, take one of the Pullman de Morelos buses. Estrella de Oro provides first-class service to Acapulco and Zihuatanejo.

The smallest of the four is the western station, Terminal de Autobuses del Poniente, Av. Sur #122 at Tacubaya (M: Observatorio, line 1). This is the easiest way to take a day trip to Toluca by bus. Service also is available to Morelia and Guadalajara; the going is slow but the scenery is pleasant.

### **Getting Around**

#### City Layout

Mexico City's colonias, or neighborhoods, are threaded by a maze of calles, avenidas and calzadas. Some narrow alleyways, or callejones, are cobblestoned relics from earlier days. Major thoroughfares, on the other hand, can have eight lanes.

Many signs tend to be more confusing than enlightening. There is no real logic to the city's streets, which are named after rivers, mountains, foreign cities and countries, musicians, writers, doctors, composers, the states of Mexico and just about everything else. Streets also change names frequently.

Connected highways form the Circuito Interior, which roughly encircles the central city. Beginning at the airport, on the east side of town, Avenida Río Consulado runs north and then west, becoming Calzada Melchor Ocampo. Ocampo swings south, passing east of Chapultepec Park and intersecting Paseo de la Reforma, at which point it continues as Calzada Vasconcelos. Angling off Vasconcelos is Avenida de la Revolución, which runs south to Avenida Río Churubusco. Churubusco then proceeds east before turning north to connect with Río Consulado, southwest of the airport, and completing the circuit.

Theoretically, this loop provides a less congested alternative to the jam-packed streets within it. However, these roads themselves are usually crowded, particularly during the morning and evening rush hours.

Also within the Circuito Interior are axis roads (ejes), a series of numbered boulevards running one way only, with special lanes reserved for trolleys and buses circulating in the opposite direction. East-west Eje 1 Norte and Eje 2 Norte are north of the *Zócalo*, Eje 2 Sur through Eje 8 Sur run progressively south of the Zócalo. North-south Eje 1 through 3 Oriente are east of Eje Central Lázaro Cárdenas, which divides the central city in half; Eje 1 through 3 Poniente are to the west.

Paseo de la Reforma intersects the central city. A legacy of self-proclaimed French emperor Maximilian, this broad artery runs southwest to northeast for more than 7 miles. From the eastern end of Chapultepec Park to past Alameda Park, Reforma is exceptionally wide and is punctuated by several *glorietas* (traffic circles).

An easily spotted reference landmark is the Independence Monument, a 150-foot-tall spire topped by a gold angel that stands at the intersection of Reforma, Avenida Florencia and Calle Río Tiber. Another is the Cuauhtémoc Monument at the intersection at Paseo de la Reforma and Avenida Insurgentes.

Insurgentes, the capital's longest thoroughfare, runs north/south, bisecting western and eastern sections of the city. East-west Viaducto Miguel Alemán runs south of downtown, connecting Calzada Ignacio Zaragoza at the eastern end of the city with the Anillo Periférico at the western end. The Periférico (Mex. 57) traverses the city's western and southern sections.

Driving just about anywhere within Mexico City is a daunting prospect and not recommended. The sheer number of vehicles makes for an extremely slow pace. Add to that aggressive tactics (locals often disregard traffic signals), frequent construction, detours and a plethora of one-way streets, and you're far better off relying on taxi transportation provided by your hotel. Above all, never drive alone after dark due to the risk of car hijacking, robbery or assault.

If you must drive, always park in a guarded lot; street parking is not only hard to come by but chancy, as vandalism can occur. Any vehicle parked illegally is likely to have the license plate removed by police; expect to pay a fee to get it back. Never leave valuables in your car, even if hidden.

At many downtown intersections, motorists stopped at a red light will be besieged by everyone from beggars to performing children (whose parents are often sitting on a nearby corner) to vendors selling newspapers, flowers, candy and trinkets. The best defense if you're part of this captive audience is to keep your door locked, your window rolled up and look straight ahead, avoiding eye contact.

Speed limits are shown in kilometers. If a road, avenue or street is unmarked, follow these general guidelines: school zones, 20 km/h (10-12 mph); residential streets, 30 km/h (20 mph); main streets, 50 km/h (30 mph); avenues, bypasses, loop roads and overpasses within the city, 60

km/h (35 mph); main highways, 100 km/h (60 mph); selected main highways and toll roads, 110-120 km/h (65-75 mph).

#### **Taxis**

Major hotels maintain fleets of turismo taxis associated specifically with the hotel. These can be used for short hops to a nearby restaurant and back, or for longer excursions to shop or sightsee. For an hourly rate (and normally a 2-hour time minimum), you can arrange to have the taxi driver wait at a specific location in addition to providing your transportation. Negotiate rates for individual trips with the driver; establish the fee for any excursion in advance. Although turismo taxis are expensive (a ride just a few blocks in length can cost several dollars), the peace of mind is well worth the cost.

J.R. Taxi is a reliable taxi service; the owner/driver speaks English, is familiar with all of the city's major tourist attractions, and can pick up passengers at the airport or at designated bus stations. Favorable rates are offered to AAA members, and American Express, Mastercard and Visa are accepted. Phone (044) 55-5100-7542 (cell number) in Mexico City, (044) 5100-7542 elsewhere within Mexico, or (52-155) 5100-7542 outside of Mexico.

If your hotel doesn't provide transportation or you otherwise need a taxi, the U.S. Embassy strongly urges that you ride only in a taxi summoned by phone from a designated sitio (SEE-tee-oh) stand. They are considered safer than taxis that circulate because the driver can be easily traced back to the stand. Many of the stands list telephone numbers where the taxi can be called. Arrangements also can be made to have these cabs pick you up at a predetermined time and place.

Ask for the license plate number and the cab driver's name, and only use taxis with plates beginning with the letter "S," which are assigned to a particular site—such as a hotel—and registered. The number on the license plate should match the number painted on the side of the cab. It's much easier to negotiate for a sitio taxi if you speak fluent Spanish.

For safety reasons, you should never hail a cab on the street. Also avoid the constantly cruising taxis with license plates containing the letter "L" (libre cabs). While residents must use these taxis to get around the overcrowded city, their drivers drivers often are involved in robberies against passengers. The drivers themselves also are frequent victims of assault, making this a dangerous profession.

#### **Rental Cars**

There are many rental car agencies in Mexico City. The larger companies also have branches in major cities where you can leave your car at the end of your trip. Be sure you fully understand the terms of any rental contract, especially in regard to insurance coverage. It's much less expensive to reserve a rental car before you leave home: make reservations at least 1 week in advance. AAA members can get discounts through Hertz for vehicles booked in the United States. Ask your local AAA club or phone Hertz, (800) 654-3080.

Vehicles in the Mexico City metropolitan area, including Ciudad de México (CDMX) and parts of the state of Mexico, may not be driven on certain days based on the last digit of the license plate. Double check that your exact rental can be driven on the days you want to use it; a rental agency may inadvertently provide you with a vehicle that can't be driven on those days.

Although having a rental car at your disposal can be convenient for sightseeing trips outside the metropolitan area, keep in mind that your rental car may unfortunately make you a target for police who will try to extract a bribe.

#### **Buses**

Mexico City public buses go just about everywhere and are inexpensive, but the system is not very user-friendly. Routes and bus numbers change frequently, and route maps are practically nonexistent. Some signs at downtown stops include route descriptions. Buses run daily 5 a.m.-midnight, but they show up much less frequently after 10 p.m.

Two major bus routes put you within walking distance of many of the city's attractions. The east-west route links the *Zócalo* with the National Auditorium in Chapultepec Park and continues to the Observatorio Metro station (line 1), traveling along Avenida Francisco I. Madero, Avenida Juárez and Paseo de la Reforma. These buses are usually marked "Zócalo" on the windshield.

Buses running north-south along Avenida Insurgentes connect the huge Terminal Norte station with the southern suburbs of San Angel and University City via the Zona Rosa. These buses are usually marked Verdes-Tlalpan."

Never carry valuables onto a city bus, and know exactly where you're going before you board. But unless you simply want to have the experience of riding the bus, it's safer and much more convenient to get around in a taxi associated with your hotel.

#### **Peseros**

Peseros or micros (MEE-crows) are cheaper than taxis and charge flat rates as low as 5 pesos based on distance. Route destinations, often a Metro station, are marked on the windshield or shown on a sign. Flag down



a *pesero* as you would a bus, and tell the driver your destination when you board.

The main east-west and north-south corridors (the Zócalo to Chapultepec Park and Avenida Insurgentes Sur, respectively) are the most convenient routes. Try to have the exact change in pesos and never pull out a wallet, which will attract the attention of pickpockets.

Millions of working-class city residents ride peseros every day, but like city buses they're a form of public transportation best experienced for the thrill; drivers slouch in their seats, blasting music and aggressively maneuvering through chaotic traffic while passengers hang on for dear life. If you're not used to traveling like that, a hotel-designated taxi is still the safest—and sanest—way to travel.

#### Metro

Mexico City's Metro—one of the world's busiest subway systems—moves millions of riders daily on tracks running both above and below ground. Metro lines cover most of the city. In addition, a tren ligero (light rail) line provides service to the popular tourist attraction of Xochimilco. The two lines you'll find most convenient for sightseeing are Lines 1 and 2, as they cover major points of interest.

Line 1 runs roughly west to east from the Observatory, near Chapultepec Park, to Pantitlán in the eastern suburbs, passing south of the Zona Rosa and the Zócalo. If you're going to the airport, switch to line 5 at the Pantitlán station. Line 2 begins in the northwest part of the city at the Cuatro Caminos station, proceeds east, burrows under the Zócalo and then runs above ground south to the Taxqueña station.

Line 3 runs from the Indios Verdes station, north of the Basilica of Guadalupe, south past Alameda Park to University City (National University of Mexico campus). Line 4 runs north to south east of downtown, from the Martín Carrera to the Santa Anita stations. Line 5 runs from the Politécnico station south to the La Raza station, then east and south to Pantitlán, with a stop (Terminal Aérea) at the airport. **Note:** To switch from line 3 to line 5—or vice versa—at the La Raza station requires a 10- to 15-minute walk through a long tunnel.

Line 6 runs north of downtown, proceeding east from the El Rosario station to the Martín Carrera station via the Instituto del Petróleo and Deportivo 18 de Marzo stations. Line 7 runs north to south along the city's western edge from the El Rosario station to the Barranca del Muerto station. Line 8 runs from the Garibaldi station (one stop north of the Bellas Artes station on line 2) south and east to the Constitución de 1917 station, in the southeast section of the city. Line 9 parallels line 1 and runs south of it,

from the Tacubaya station in the west to the Pantitlán station in the east.

Two additional lines provide light rail service. Line A runs from the Pantitlán station (the eastern terminus of lines 1, 5 and 9) south to the La Paz station; Line B serves the Buenavista Railroad Station and runs east to the Garibaldi station (the northern terminus of line 8), then north to the Ciudad Azteca station. The tren ligero line runs south from the Taxqueña station south to Xochimilco.

The flat fare, which includes transfers, is 5 pesos. Ticket vending machines dispense prepaid electronic farecards in various denominations. Swipe the cards at long rows of turnstiles to access the boarding ramps. If you plan on using the subway, purchase several tickets at a time to minimize your time spent waiting in lines. You also can purchase an abono ticket, which lets you use the entire system for a multi-day period. (With this type of ticket, enter Metro stations only through the blue turnstiles; otherwise the ticket will not be returned.)

Metro is accessible for people with disabilities, and those over age 65 ride free by going through the turnstiles that have police officers. Present a legal ID and an officer will swipe the machine for you. Once inside the turnstile, riders can access any of the system's lines.

Metro lines are designated by the following colors, which appear at the stations, on signs and in guidebooks and brochures: lines 1 and A, bright pink; line 2, blue; line 3, olive green; line 4, light blue; line 5, yellow; line 6, red; line 7, orange; line 8, dark green; and line 9, brown. Consult a color-coded subway guide at Metro information booths, or try obtaining a map of the system from the ticket booths at the larger stations.

The most striking aspect of the subway is the sea of people. There are restrictions on carrying personal items like luggage and backpacks, but the rules aren't enforced; many people tote large bundles and plastic bags filled with goods. The modern rail cars show some wear and tear as well as graffiti, but the ride is smooth and quiet. Keep in mind, however, that Metro is used daily by millions for commuter travel, so sardine-can conditions usually prevail. During weekday rush hours (both morning and evening) the trains are crammed and guards are employed to control the crowds; avoid using the system during these times and also after dark.

There are plenty of restrooms and the ubiquitous stands selling food and snacks. Most areas are well illuminated and ventilated. Cellphones generally do not work underground, and taking photographs is not permitted.

Pairs of police officers are at station entrances, and there are more police at turnstiles and patrolling the ramps, but they do not in general ride on the rail cars. Single women, unfortunately, may have to fend off unwelcome advances or inappropriate male conduct. Foreign visitors are prime targets for pickpockets and pursesnatchers, especially at stations near major tourist sights. There are separate cars for women and children during rush hours, but regulations are not strictly enforced.

Although it can be convenient to use the subway for sightseeing, especially to get to Xochimilco or the southern neighborhoods of Coyoacán and San Angel, for safety's sake it's best to hire a taxi affiliated with your hotel if you intend to visit these areas. If you do need to take Metro for any reason, double check which direction the train is heading. Check the signs on the loading platforms (andenes); they denote the last station on the line in each direction. For example, Dirección Pantitlán and Dirección Observatorio indicate the last stations for line 1. Transfer gates, where more than one line shares a subway station, are marked Correspondencia; the exits are marked Salida.

Metro is least crowded on weekends and holidays. In general trains begin running at 5 a.m. Mon.-Fri., 6 a.m. Sat., 7 a.m. Sun., and operate until 12:30 a.m. It's best not to carry personal items that hinder movement, and remain aware of your surroundings at all times.

#### **Guides/Tours**

The services of a good guide can be expensive but invaluable when you're visiting Mexico City. If you go with this option, find a bonded guide licensed by the Secretaría de Turismo (the Mexican Ministry of Tourism, or SECTUR). Ask to see their official guide card marked with "Departamento de Turismo" and take special note of the expiration date next to the photograph.

Taxi drivers also can function as a driver/bodyguard/ guide, even if it means waiting by the car for an hour while you stroll one of the city's tourist-friendly neighborhoods. Rates are negotiable, but expect to pay a minimum of 230 pesos an hour. You'll likely find it well worth the price to not have to negotiate city traffic or use public transportation.

### What To See

To make it easier to plan a sightseeing itinerary in this sprawling city, attraction listings are grouped under nine separate, geographically based subheadings and spotted on three different maps: Mexico City & Vicinity, Mexico City, City of Mexico and Downtown Mexico City.

#### Around the Zócalo

GRAN HOTEL CIUDAD DE MEXICO is just w. of the Zócalo at Av. 16 de Septiembre #82 (M: Zócalo, line 2); the parking entrance is located between avenidas 5 de Febrero and Palma. Renovations have ensured that this five-story building—a grand example of turn-of-the-20thcentury architecture in the Chicago style—retains much of its original splendor. Take a peek inside the spacious atrium lobby; it boasts a spectacular Tiffany stained-glass ceiling and gilded, open-cage elevators. La Terraza, the rooftop terrace restaurant overlooking the Zócalo, is a great choice for lunch or sunset watching with a view. Phone: (55) 1083-7700.

GREAT TEMPLE (Templo Mayor) encompasses a city block just n. of the *Zócalo*; the site entrance is on Av. Seminario (M: Zócalo, line 2). The only available parking is a commercial underground garage near the Palace of Fine Arts. The Great Temple, or Teocalli, of the Aztecs was a monumental pyramid that served as a religious, political and sacrificial center. These ruins in the heart of a present-day metropolis are striking evidence of a separate civilization that flourished hundreds of years earlier.

Demolished and buried by conquering Spaniards, the structure was accidentally discovered by a subway construction worker in 1978. The excavated ruins reveal successive layers of older temples, each built atop the other, and include other structures as well as a stone replica of a tzompantli, or wall of skulls. Background information in Spanish explains the origin of the different temples. Audio guides in English are available.

Note: Visitors must proceed through the complex in one direction and cannot turn around and go back once inside the site. Photographs without flash are permitted. Time: Allow 1 hour, 30 minutes minimum. Phone: (55) 4040-5600.

Great Temple Museum (Museo Templo Mayor) is at avs. Guatemala and Seminario, within the Great Temple. The museum provides a valuable historical perspective, especially for those unfamiliar with Aztec lore. On display are more than 7,000 items recovered from the site and locations as far away as the present-day states of Veracruz and Guerrero. There are eight exhibit rooms (salas) on three levels, organized around a central open space dominated by the original discovery, the enormous stone carving depicting the goddess Coyolxauhgui, beheaded and limbless. This impressive piece is best viewed from the vantage point of the top floor.

Also noteworthy are life-size, terra-cotta eagle warrior statues and stone masks that were offered as tributes by subjugated tribes. Excavations at the site are ongoing and continue to unearth major artifacts; more recent discoveries include a stone carving of Tlaltecuhtli, the goddess of earth fertility (displayed on the first floor) and a ceremonial platform dating from the late 15th century. Phone: (55) 4040-5600.

METROPOLITAN CATHEDRAL (Catedral Metropolitana) is on the n. side of the Zócalo (M: Zócalo. politana) is on the n. side of the *Zócalo* (M: Zócalo, line 2). This enormous church seems even bigger rising up from the vast expanse of the Zócalo. The original church built by Spanish missionaries was torn down in the early 17th century to make way for the cathedral, which took some 220 years to complete. The exterior is a blend of architectural styles, from baroque ornamentation to a neoclassic clock tower.

Four identical interior domes are supported by massive columns. Along the interior side aisles are five naves and 14 chapels, each dedicated to a saint and variously adorned with statuary, ornate altars, paintings, gilded surfaces, priceless tapestries and representations of Christ, including a Black Christ figure. The Chapel of the Kings, at the end of the nave behind the main altar, is graced by gilded wood carvings and an extravagantly Churrigueresque altarpiece.

There are many colonial works of art on display, including a painting attributed to Spanish artist Bartolomé Esteban Murillo. The cathedral also contains the tomb of Mexican general Agustín de Iturbide. In this reverent setting, visitors should respect those who are there to worship.

All manner of crystals, herbs, gemstones and religious paraphernalia are sold in front of the main entrance. On the west side of the cathedral more vendors set up shop, selling everything from crafts to Mexican jumping beans, and laborers sit on the curb next to small signs advertising their trade.

A sound-and-light presentation, "Voices of the Cathedral," features a candlelit walk through the interior led by actors in period costume and accompanied by choral music. The *Re*forma newspaper publishes the schedule of presentations every 3 months. Tickets are \$25 (U.S.) and can be purchased through Ticketmaster; phone (55) 5325-9000.

**Sacristy** (El Sagrario) adjoins the Metropolitan Cathedral. This church, built in the mid-18th century to house vestments and sacred relics, has an elaborate baroque facade. Both the Sacristy and the cathedral were damaged in the 1985 earthquake, and each has also tilted over decades as the buildings ever so slowly sink into the underlying lake bed, requiring ongoing repair work to mitigate the effects of uneven settling.

MUNICIPAL PALACE (Palacio del Ayuntamiento) faces the Zócalo's s. side (M: Zócalo, line 2). It serves as City Hall. The original building at the square's southwest corner dates from 1724. On the front arcade are coat-of-arms mosaics depicting Mexican cities, states and regions, including Coyoacán, site of the first city hall in the Valley of Mexico; the 1168 founding of Aztec capital Tenochtitlan;

and the Villa Rica de la Vera Cruz, said to be the first city hall in the continental Americas.

In order to see the Hall of Rulers (Salón Virreyes) and the Legislative Assembly Hall (Sala de Cabildos) visitors must present identification and sign in at the visitor desk on the first floor. The exhibit halls are located on the second floor. The Hall of Rulers is a collection of paintings—including one of Hernando Cortés—displayed in two rooms. Adjacent to these rooms is the room where the Mexican legislative assembly met until 1928; it contains original furniture. Spanish-only guided tours are available. Time: Allow 30 minutes minimum. **Phone:** (55) 5345-8000.

NATIONAL MUSEUM OF CULTURES (Museo Nacional de Las Culturas) is at Calle Moneda #13, near the cathedral and just e. of the Zócalo (M: Zócalo, line 2). The historic building it occupies was built in the early 18th century and once housed the Royal Mint of New Spain.

Permanent and rotating exhibits offer an overview of the world's cultures. The objects on display, all professionally mounted and well illuminated, range from textiles, ceramic figures, pottery and sculpture to armor, weaponry, masks and jewelry. The collections are a mix of original pieces and high-quality replicas. The three floors of exhibit halls encompass a lovely central patio. A striking Rufino Tamayo mural in the lobby depicts the 1910 Revolution. Exhibit information is in Spanish only. Time: Allow 2 hours minimum. **Phone:** (55) 5542-0484.

NATIONAL PALACE (Palacio Nacional) is along Av. Pino Suárez, facing the e. side of the Zócalo (M: Zócalo, line 2). This grand building dates from the late 17th century (a third floor was added in 1926) and has housed the offices of Mexican government officials since 1821.

It took Diego Rivera and his assistants, mounted on scaffolds, some 25 years to execute the sweeping, lavishly detailed historical murals that decorate the upper level of the central courtyard and the walls of the main staircase. They show centuries of history, from romantically idealized views of Aztec life before the arrival of Hernando Cortés to the bloody 1910 Revolution. Rivera's themes of class struggle, industrialization, the plight of the common worker and bourgeois decadence are vividly depicted. These magnificent works of art are the main reason to visit.

Hanging over the central doorway is the Independence Bell, tolled by Father Miguel Hidalgo in 1810 to proclaim Mexican independence from Spain; on Sept. 15 Mexico's president rings the bell in an annual ceremonial reenactment of Hidalgo's plea for freedom.

There also are two museums. The Benito Juárez Museum consists of several large rooms displaying furnishings, manuscripts, artwork and other artifacts associated

with the former Mexican president; the Parliamentary Museum has elegant fabric-covered walls, gold chandeliers, flags and the formal "well" used for parliamentary sessions. At the palace's far end is a lovely, relaxing garden with benches and stone fountains.

**Note:** A photo ID is required to enter the building. There may be a wait in line, since only a limited number of visitors are allowed inside at any given time. Public restrooms are available.

#### Within the Historic Center

CITIBANAMEX PALACE OF CULTURE (Palacio de Cultura Citibanamex) is w. of the Zócalo at Av. Madero #17 near Av. Bolívar (M: Bellas Artes, lines 2 and 8). Commissioned by the Count of San Mateo de Valparaíso as a dowry for his daughter, the former Iturbide Palace is a fine example of the 18th-century baroque architectural style. It became a hotel in 1850, was purchased by the National Bank of Mexico (Banco de Mexico) in 1966 and today houses a bank-underwritten museum promoting Mexican culture. Exhibits are on two floors surrounding a colonnaded courtyard.

The longer-term exhibits on the second floor include framed art, sculpture, photographs, audiovisual presentations and interactive displays. The main floor features rotating exhibits often focusing on traditional popular art.

Guided tours in Spanish are given daily at noon, 2 and 4. Guided tours in English are available by advance reservation; phone a few days prior to visiting the museum. Children are not permitted on guided tours. **Phone:** (55) 1226-0004.

MUSEUM OF MEXICO CITY (Museo de la Ciudad de México) is 3 blks. s. of the *Zócalo* at Pino Suárez #30, near República del Salvador (M: Pino Suárez, line 2). The wellpreserved building housing this museum was formerly the palace of the Counts of Santiago de Calimaya, descendants of conquistadores associated with Hernán Cortés. It features stone archways and two interior courtyards.

Exhibits survey the history, culture and people of both the ancient and modern city. An overhead catwalk looks down on displays re-creating daily life in the Aztec city of Tenochtitlan, where canoes were the primary means of conveyance for people and goods, and show how present-day neighborhoods like Tacuba and Coyoacán looked back then.

There also are collections of 19th-century carriages, traditional costumes and Aztec sculptures, feather-adorned pieces and gold bracelets, Artwork includes murals and paintings by Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera.

A permanent display of black-and-white images showing gridlocked cars, turbulent political scenes, earthquake damage and a sea of humanity in the Zócalo dramatically evokes the day-to-day challenges of living in this enormous metropolis. Temporary rotating exhibits are presented regularly.

**Time:** Allow 2 hours minimum. **Phone:** (55) 5542-0487.

OLD COLLEGE OF SAN ILDEFONSO (Antiguo Colegio de San Ildefonso) is just n. of the Great Temple (Templo Mayor) and 2 blks. n. and just e. of the Zócalo at Av. Justo Sierra #16, between Avenida República de Argentina and Calle del Carmen (M: Zócalo, line 2). This outstanding co-Ionial edifice, built in 1749, was originally the Jesuit School of San Ildefonso. Converted to a museum and cultural center in 1992, it has three floors displaying Spanish colonial works of art, paintings by Fernando Leal and traveling exhibitions.

The corridors and rooms surrounding the main patio feature impressive José Clemente Orozco murals depicting post-Revolutionary Mexico, as well as murals by other artists. The smaller Patio of the Undergraduates (Patio de Los Pasantes) has three arched sides and a fourth wall surrounding a small courtyard. Inside the Simón Bolivar Amphitheater, the main entrance to the complex, is "The Creation," an early Diego Rivera mural. Time: Allow 2 hours minimum. Phone: (55) 3602-0035. GT

### **Alameda Park and Vicinity**

**ALAMEDA CENTRAL** is just w. of the Palace of Fine Arts between avs. Juárez and Hidalgo. Two Metro stations are close by: Hidalgo (lines 2 and 3) is at the intersection of Hidalgo and Paseo de la Reforma, a block off the park's northwest corner; Bellas Artes (lines 2 and 8) is at the park's northeast corner. Smack in the middle of Mexico City's concrete jungle, this rectangular, centrally located green space—an Aztec market prior to the Conquest and during most of the 19th century a retreat reserved for the wealthy—is surrounded by museums, theaters, hotels and restaurants.

The park is large, clean and well maintained, landscaped with poplar, ash and willow trees. There are benches, fountains, French sculptures and a Moorish kiosk. It's lively every day, but weekends bring the best people watching; food and drink stands set up and vendors peddle their wares to the assembled crowd of families, couples and roving packs of teenagers.

Facing Avenida Juárez along the park's southern boundary is the Juárez Monument (Hemiciclo de Juárez), which has a semicircular design. It honors Benito Juárez, president of Mexico from 1858 to 1872; his marble likeness stands atop a pedestal surrounded by columns. A celebration on Mar. 21 honors Juárez's birthday. Public restrooms are available, and there are plenty of police (who patrol on horseback on weekends).

HOUSE OF TILES (Casa de Los Azulejos) is at Av. Francisco I. Madero #4, about 2 blks. e. of Alameda Park (M: Bellas Artes, lines 2 and 8). This is one of the city's finest colonial mansions. It was built in 1596 to be the residence of the Counts of Orizaba. The exterior is covered with decorative blue and white tiles from Puebla; the bronze balustrade was transported from China.

The flagship branch of the Sanborns restaurant chain has occupied the building since 1919. Stop in for a look at the main dining room, which has carved stone columns, large frescoes, an elaborate staircase and a bar/lounge on the second level. **Phone:** (55) 5512-1331.

MAIN POST OFFICE (Correo Mayor) is on the corner of Calle Tacuba and Av. Eje Central Lázaro Cárdenas, across from the Palace of Fine Arts (M: Bellas Artes, lines 2 and 8). It was designed by Italian architect Adam Boari—who also designed the Palace of Fine Arts—and has been in operation since 1907. It incorporates Gothic, Moorish, Renaissance, Spanish and Venetian architectural elements and features an ornate exterior with intricately carved stone around the windows and along the roofline. The interior ironwork, staircases and furnishings were mostly imported.

On the second floor, the Philatelic Museum (Museo Filatélico) displays stamp collections and antique Mexican postal equipment, including enormous stamp machines that dispensed 1-centavo stamps. The post office is the point of reference for the city's street numbering system. Phone: (55) 5512-0091.

NATIONAL ART MUSEUM (Museo Nacional de Arte) is at Calzada Tacuba #8, directly e. of the Palace of Fine Arts (M: Bellas Artes, lines 2 and 8). This outstanding museum, formerly the Palace of Communications and Public Works, has 33 exhibit halls displaying national art treasures. The halls are large and uncluttered, focusing on just one or two magnificent pieces per wall. Works include paintings, sculptures, pre-Columbian figures, metal work and even ornately framed video screens that flicker with constantly changing images. One surprising and fun exhibit is a video of an apartment building showing residents beginning and ending their day.

Also noteworthy are the rooms devoted to 17th-century painters Juan Correa and Cristóbal de Villalpando, both of whom were inspired by the sensual style of Peter Paul Reubens, and 20th-century artist María Asúnsolo. Two elegant curved staircases at the back of the museum lead to the upper levels; at the bottom are two lions supporting a buttress with five lamps. The underside of one stairwell is decorated with the painting "Peace Defeating War."

El Caballito (The Little Horse) stands in the center of the square fronting the museum. This 30-ton sculpture, the work of Manuel Tolsá, depicts King Charles IV of Spain astride his horse. It was cast in 1803 from a single piece of bronze. Time: Allow 2 hours minimum. Phone: (55) 8647-5430, ext. 5065. GT

PALACE OF FINE ARTS (Palacio de Bellas Artes) stands between the e. end of Alameda Park and Av. Lázaro Cárdenas/Eje Central (M: Bellas Artes, lines 2 and 8). Construction of this palatial building, designed by Italian architect Adamo Boari, began in 1904 but was interrupted by the Revolution of 1910. Finally dedicated in 1934, it is a legacy of Porfirio Díaz's economically progressive but politically oppressive regime.

The decorative sculptures on the facade include garlands, flowers, masks and a sculptural group called "Harmony." A sculpture of Pegasus stands in the outdoor esplanade. Inside the look is pure 1930s Art Deco. Two works by Mexican painter Rufino Tamayo are on the second floor.

The huge second- and third-floor murals by Diego Rivera, José Clemente Orozco and David Alfaro Sigueiros are highlights. Orozco's "Catharsis" depicts man's social versus natural tendencies, while Sigueiros' allegorical "New Democracy" shows a female figure breaking free of chains. "Man at the Crossroads" was originally commissioned for New York City's Rockefeller Center in 1933; after being rejected due to its anti-capitalist themes, Rivera re-created it here the following year.

On the fourth floor is the National Museum of Architecture (Museo Nacional de Arquitectura). It displays models, sketches and photographs and features changing exhibits primarily focusing on contemporary architecture.

The city's premier cultural center is home to the National Opera Company, the National Ballet of Mexico, the National Dance Company and the National Symphony Orchestra. Traveling exhibitions of art, sculpture and photography are presented regularly.

Phone: (55) 8647-6500.

Ballet Folklórico de México is presented in the Palace of Fine Arts theater. This theatrical, colorful spectacle showcases many forms of Mexican folk music and dance. The theater is famed for its 22-ton crystal curtain, actually a double-walled steel curtain. The side that faces the audience was crafted from 1 million pieces of opalescent glass resembling a large window and depicts snowcapped volcanic peaks Popocatépetl and Iztaccíhuatl. The halfhour curtain show is given only before the Sunday morning performance. Also see Concerts, p. 350.

**Phone:** (55) 5325-9000 for Ticketmaster.



### **Chapultepec Park and Vicinity**

CHAPULTEPEC CASTLE (Castillo de Chapultepec) is within Chapultepec Park (M: Chapultepec, line 1). It stands atop a 200-foot-high hill (Cerro de Chapulín, or Grasshopper Hill) overlooking the central part of the city. Aztec emperors once used this stony outcrop as a summer retreat. Construction of the castle began in 1783. Completed in 1840, it was fortified and became a military college. When it was attacked and taken in 1847 by U.S. forces during the Mexican-American War, the castle was defended solely by its young cadets. After passing through a succession of leaders it was finally bequeathed to the nation in 1939 by President Lázaro Cárdenas.

The climb to the castle along a paved walkway winding up Chapultepec Hill is fairly steep and takes about 20 minutes. En route there are frequent views of the downtown skyline. For a small fee, visitors can ride a tourist train that is boarded inside the park entrance and transports passengers up the hill.

Caracol Museum/Gallery of History (Museo de Caracol/Galería de Historia) is within Chapultepec Park, about halfway up the hill to Chapultepec Castle. The name "caracol" refers to the building's spiral shape, which resembles a snail's shell.

Twelve descending salas (exhibit halls) offer detailed, colorful dioramas that depict memorable past events in Mexican history, including Father Miguel Hidalgo's military campaign to secure independence from Spain, the Mexican-American War, French intervention in the 1860s and the Mexican Revolution of 1910. The chamber of red tezontle (volcanic) stone at the end of this walk through the past is covered with an impressive dome and is dominated by three objects: the national flag, a carved-stone eagle and a facsimile of the 1917 Constitution. Explanations are in Spanish.

Time: Allow 1 hour minimum. Phone: (55) 5211-5239.

National Museum of History (Museo Nacional de Historia) is the first building before Chapultepec Castle and adjacent to it; there is no sign. A guided tour proceeds through 12 salas (exhibit halls) tracing Mexican history from the Spanish conquest to the Revolution of 1910 and the adoption of the 1917 constitution. Weapons, paintings, clothing, furniture and maps are displayed. The Salón de *Virreyes* contains portraits of historical figures and rulers from Hernando Cortés to 20th-century Mexican presidents, while the Salón de Malaquitas has doors and other objects fashioned out of malachite.

Murals depict important events in the nation's history, and there also is a striking mural painting of Mexican artists such as Jorge Gonzalez Camarena and José Clemente Orozco. Exhibit information is in Spanish. Visitors will find self-employed, English-speaking tour guides for hire near the museum's front doors; expect to pay about \$30 U.S. per hour.

Flash photography is not permitted. **Time:** Allow 2 hours minimum. Phone: (55) 4040-5206.

CHAPULTEPEC PARK (Bosque de Chapultepec) spreads out on either side of Paseo de la Reforma; the main entrance is 1 blk. w. of the Chapultepec Metro station (M: Chapultepec, line 1; Auditorio and Constituyentes, line 7). Nearly twice the size of New York City's Central Park, this sprawling green space was once the exclusive province of Aztec emperors. Montezuma cypress trees (called *ahuehuete* in Mexico) shade much of this vast city park.

Despite centuries of wear and tear, it's fascinating to stroll along the cobbled walkways, as much for the people-watching as anything else. You won't see many foreign tourists; this is very much a gathering place for local residents. Sunday, when families come here to enjoy their day off, is a fun time to visit.

Chapultepec is divided into three sections. Several notable museums and a number of park attractions are located in the oldest (eastern) section ("1a Sección"), including the National Museum of Anthropology, the Museum of Modern Art and the National Museum of History in Chapultepec Castle. The section west of Calzada Molino del Rey ("2a Sección") is newer and contains most of the kid-oriented attractions. The Pines (Los Piños), the Mexican president's residence, is just east of Molino del Rev.

Chapultepec Park Zoo (Parque Zoológico de Chapultepec) is in the eastern section of Chapultepec Park, s. of Paseo de la Reforma off Calzada Chivatito (near the National Museum of Anthropology). It displays giant pandas-this is one of the few zoos to have successfully bred them in captivity—a white tiger, rhinos, monkeys, black swans, penguins, tarantulas and other animals, most of them residing in natural habitats. There's also an aviary, reptile and butterfly exhibits and a miniature train ride.

It can get guite crowded, especially on weekends: try and go early in the morning. Phone: (55) 5553-6263. (11)

Children's Museum (Papalote Museo del Niño) is at Av. Constituyentes #268 in Chapultepec Park's second (western) section (near the Anillo Periférico). Themed areas explore the human body, science, computers and artistic expression, among other subjects. Kids will love the contraption that makes giant soap bubbles. In addition to the many interactive, hands-on activities, there's also an IMAX theater and a planetarium.

Phone: (55) 5237-1700.

Don Quixote Fountain (Fuente de Don Quijote) stands in Quixote Square, just off Gran Avenida, w. of Lake Chapultepec and s. of the Botanic Garden. The fountain is within a pavilion designed in the shape of a simple cube. A mural by Diego Rivera covering its bottom depicts the evolution of life by water. The hydraulic works in the vicinity receive water from the Río Lerma. Also on the square is a metallic structure housing two small sculptures of Quixote and sidekick Sancho Panza in the midst of an argument.

La Feria is Chapultepec Park's second (western) section off the Circuito Bosque de Chapultepec, w. of the Anillo Periférico. This amusement park is dominated by a pair of huge roller coasters, the wooden Russian Mountain (Montaña Rusa) and the triple-loop Quimera. There are also kiddie and family-friendly rides, a haunted house (La Casona del Terror), bungee jumping, go-karts and other activities.

Lake House (Casa del Lago) is in the heart of Chapultepec Park's oldest (eastern) section, on the western shore of Lake Chapultepec (Lago de Chapultepec). This elegant-looking building was built in the early 20th century as a summer home for Mexican president Porfirio Díaz. Today it functions as a cultural center, offering numerous workshops and classes open to the public. A short distance west of the lake is the park's Botanical Garden (Jardín Botánico), featuring plants from the world's different climatic zones.

Man-made Lake Chapultepec has cement banks and greenish-hued water that is not particularly clean. It's a very popular spot for families, especially on Sundays; go during the week for a more relaxed stroll past gardens and along walkways lined with souvenir stands and food vendors. Rowboat and paddleboat rentals are available. Phone: (55) 5211-6093.

Monument to the Child Heroes (Monumento de Los Niños Héroes) is near the entrance to Chapultepec Park. The group of columns pays tribute to six cadets who were among those defending Chapultepec Castle, then a military college, against American troops at the height of the Mexican-American War in 1847. They reputedly leaped to their deaths wrapped in the Mexican flag rather than be captured.

Museum of Natural History (Museo de Historia Natural) is in Chapultepec Park's second (western) section off the Circuito Bosque de Chapultepec. Nine multicolored, interconnecting dome-shaped buildings house displays pertaining to the origin of the universe, life on Earth, ecology, biology and evolution. **Phone:** (55) 5515-0739, ext. 112.

Museum of Technology (Museo Tecnológico, or MUTEC) is in Chapultepec Park's second (western) section off the Circuito Bosque de Chapultepec, s. of La Feria (M: Constituyentes, line 7). Exhibits and interactive displays focus on machinery and the country's technological development. There's also a planetarium and a playroom geared toward young children.

Rotunda of Illustrious Persons (Rotonda de las Personas Ilustres) is within Dolores Cemetery (Panteón Civil de Dolores), in the western section of Chapultepec Park at avs. Constituyentes and Civil Dolores (M: Constituyentes, line 7). Mexico's national cemetery, the largest in the country, opened in 1875 and is the final resting place of military leaders and political figures as well as ordinary citizens. It's estimated that some 700,00 people are buried here, and the jumble of gravesites ranges from simple markers to elaborate mausoleums.

A gate within the cemetery leads to the rotunda, a large, sunken, circular open-air plaza. Surrounding the plaza are two concentric circles of graves. Diego Rivera, David Alfaro Sigueiros and José Clemente Orozco—Mexico's three most famous muralists—are in this section, which is reserved for those who made a significant contribution to Mexico's history or culture. Other notables include Nobel Prize-winning author Octavio Paz and actress Dolores del Rio. A map is available at the entrance building. The entire cemetery is elaborately decorated for Day of the Dead festivities in early November, and if you visit at this time you'll see costumed skeletons as well as a profusion of marigolds, the flower of the dead. **Phone:** (55) 5273-1383.

Tlaloc Fountain (Fuente de Tlaloc) is in Section II of Chapultepec Park, next to the Carcamo municipal water pump station. Created in the early 1950s by Diego Rivera, this large and intricate mosaic of Tlaloc, the Aztec rain god, had long been abandoned but is being restored along with the concave fountain that contains it as well as the surrounding park area.

Measuring approximately 100 by 100 feet, the likeness of Tlaloc is a relief, situated about 3 feet above ground level in a position that indicates running or perhaps dancing. Behind the artwork is a domed pump house (Carcamo de Dolores) that once housed a large water tank. Inside the pump house, wall-mounted organ pipes softly echo natural sounds derived from the movement of water, and posters depict Rivera's intent to merge practical functionality with cultural expression via a single work of art.

DOLORES OLMEDO PATIÑO MUSEUM in Aztlán Parque Urbano at Av. de los Compositores in the Bosque de Chapultepec II Section. Philanthropist, art collector and benefactor of Diego Rivera, Olmedo bequeathed her hacienda, La Noria, and her outstanding art collection to the Mexican people upon Rivera's death in 1957.

Featured are Rivera paintings, drawings and engravings; paintings by Frida Kahlo (including some of her bestknown works); watercolors and engravings by Russian artist Angelina Beloff; sculptures; and Mexican folk and religious art. The lovely grounds of this immense complex are alone worth a visit, with their lush gardens, orange and fig trees, Aztec and Mayan artifacts, wandering peacocks and a friendly pack of xoloitzcuintle, a rare, midsize hairless dog with black skin dating from pre-Hispanic times. Children's programs, concerts and other special events take place Sat.-Sun.

Guided tours are available in Spanish only. Restrooms are provided. Note: The museum is closed and is scheduled to reopen in 2024 at its new location in Aztlán Parque Urbano. **Time:** Allow 2 hours minimum. **Phone:** (55) 5555-0891. **TI** 

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART (Museo de Arte Moderno) occupies a circular building on the s. side of Paseo de la Reforma (at Calle Gandhi), near the entrance to Chapultepec Park (M: Chapultepec, line 1). It celebrates the diversity of 20th-century Mexican modern art and also presents temporary exhibitions by important international artists.

The permanent collection is housed in Xavier Villaurrutia and Carlos Pellicer halls. Among its many highlights are works by Mexico's three leading muralists—Diego Rivera, David Alfaro Sigueiros and José Clemente Orozco. Paintings by another major Mexican modern artist, Rufino Tamayo, include "The Sleeping Musicians" and "The Man Radiant in Happiness." This museum also contains Frida Kahlo's "The Two Fridas," one of the surrealist's most striking works.

José Guadalupe Posada, José Luis Cuevas and Juan Soriano are other well-known artists represented, along with contemporary figures like Oliverio Hinojosa and Irma Palacios. There is a sculpture garden surrounding the museum. Exhibit information is in Spanish. Phone: (55) 8647-5530. **TI** 

NATIONAL MUSEUM OF ANTHROPOLOGY
(Museo Nacional de Antropología) is in (Museo Nacional de Antropología) is in Chapultepec Park off Calz. Mahatma Gandhi, facing the n. side of Paseo de la Reforma (M: Chapultepec, line 1 or Auditorio, line 7). A must-see stop for any Mexico City visitor, this is one of the world's finest museums.

The halls (salas) devoted to Mexico's early civilizations exhibit every conceivable type of artifact, including temple reconstructions, stone carvings, sculptures, ceramics, antique furniture, jewelry, masks, decorative objects, and arts and crafts. Dramatic lighting accentuates the remarkable artistry of the larger sculptures. Upstairs exhibit areas focus on the country's Indian cultures, showcasing musical instruments, traditional costumes and giant papier-mâché dolls.

Guided tour tickets can be purchased in the main entrance hall, which also has a bookstore selling Englishlanguage museum guides and a theater where a 20-minute orientation film is shown. Most exhibit labeling is in Spanish; newer exhibits also include an English translation.

English language audio guides are available. Wheelchairs are available. Flash photography and tripods not permitted. Time: Allow 3 hours minimum. Phone: (55) 4040-5300 for general information. GT

Aztec Hall (Sala Mexica), on the ground floor of the National Museum of Anthropology in Chapultepec Park, has as its focal point the 24-ton Aztec calendar stone, the Stone of the Sun (Piedra del Sol), with the face of the sun god carved in its center. A statue of Coatlicue depicts the goddess beheaded and wearing a skirt of snakes, while a scale model of the center of pre-Hispanic Tenochtitlan includes hundreds of detailed miniatures and an accompanying mural showing the lake that once covered the area. **Phone:** (55) 4040-5300.

Maya Hall (Sala Maya), on the ground floor of the National Museum of Anthropology, spotlights a culture that was arguably the most advanced in all Mesoamerica. While the artifacts displayed here may not equal the grandeur of their lavishly decorated temples—the singular Mayan architectural achievement—they affirm the beauty of Mayan art. Many of the ceramic figurines, pieces of jewelry and death masks were retrieved from burial sites. Phone: (55) 4040-5300.

Teotihuacán Hall (Sala Teotihuacána), on the ground floor of the National Museum of Anthropology, is devoted to the first of Mexico's great pre-Hispanic cities. Here visitors can see a reproduction of the site's Temple of Quetzalcóatl, a huge statue of Chalchiuhtlicue, the Teotihuacán goddess of the "running waters," and displays from Cholula (see separate listing under Central *Mexico*). **Phone:** (55) 4040-5300.

RUFINO TAMAYO MUSEUM (Museo Rufino Tamayo) is in Chapultepec Park, on the n. side of Paseo de la Reforma and west of Calzada Gandhi (M: Chapultepec, line 1). It displays the personal modern art collection of the Oaxacan painter and muralist, who died in 1991. Although Tamayo's work was initially criticized for its lack of political content, his reputation as a key figure of 20th-century Mexican art has grown over the years. In addition to Tamayo paintings, the large, well-lit halls display works

from the artist's personal collection by such artists as Pablo Picasso, René Magritte, Max Ernst, Mark Rothko and Joan Miró. Changing temporary exhibitions are devoted to international artists.

The museum has rooms where you can watch videos about the art on display and a cyber lounge with interactive monitors and headsets.

**Time:** Allow 2 hours minimum. **Phone:** (55) 4122-8200.

#### North of Downtown

BASILICA OF OUR LADY OF GUADALUPE (Ba-🌾 silica de Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe) is at Plaza de las Américas #1, about 10 km (6 mi.) n. of the Historic Center (M: La Villa-Basilica, line 6). From the La Villa-Basilica Metro station walk n. 2 blks. to the plaza. The site is on a hillside (Cerro del Tepevac) in the neighborhood (colonia) of Villa de Guadalupe; if you're unfamiliar with the city, take a taxi. One of Roman Catholicism's holiest shrines, the basilica honors the Guadalupe Virgin, Mexico's patron saint.

Mexican Catholics believe that at this site in December 1531 the Virgin appeared to Juan Diego, a peasant Indian, and asked him that a church be built. After hearing this story, the local bishop requested proof. Diego returned on Dec. 12, his cape filled with roses that the Virgin had directed him to pick (a rather miraculous occurrence itself, considering the time of year). When the cape was opened, the roses had disappeared and a vivid image of the dark-skinned Virgin appeared on the folds of cloth.

A large underground parking lot is filled with handicraft vendors and shops selling religious items. Visitors enter the plaza through steel gates manned by armed guards. The ornate Old Basilica (Antigua Basilica), which originally housed the sacred image, dates from the 1530s.

Near the entrance gate is the New Basilica (Nueva Basilica), which can accommodate more than 10,000 people. Daringly modern in contrast, it was built in the mid-1970s and resembles a stadium more than a church. The cloth, in a gold frame and protected by bulletproof glass, hangs above the main altar; visitors pass beneath it via two moving walkways going in opposite directions.

Also on the plaza are an information center and a museum displaying religious-themed paintings, sculptures, decorative arts and a collection of retablos (small devotional paintings incorporating traditional Catholic iconography). Other churches within the complex are the Church of the Indians (Ex-Parroquía de Indios) and the Church of Santa María de Guadalupe Capuchinas.

Time: Allow 1 hour minimum. Phone: (55) 5118-0500.

INBURSA AQUARIUM (Acuario Inbursa) is at Av. Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra #386, across the street from the Soumaya Museum (M: Polanco, line 7). Bankrolled by Mexican billionaire Carlos Slim, this is not only Mexico City's first aguarium but is subterranean to boot; visitors enter at street level and descend four levels. There are five main tanks, artificially illuminated and inhabited by some 300 different species of marine life bred in captivity.

A "sunken ship" exhibit has a backdrop of anchors, a wooden mermaid and a fake whale skeleton. Other habitats replicate tropical reefs, shoreline ecosystems and the Amazon River basin, where piranhas, crocodiles, turtles and salamanders live in placid lagoons beneath a canopy of plastic jungle vegetation. There are also penguin and jellyfish exhibits and a walk-through tunnel with an acrylic glass wall that provides up-close views of sharks and manta rays.

Note: The aquarium is a popular destination for school groups, and as a result is often crowded. It also is located in the northern part of the city, away from the Historic Center; if you would rather not use the Metro subway system, arrange for taxi transportation from your hotel. **Phone:** (55) 5395 4586, or (55) 5395-4942 for Ticketmaster.

JUMEX MUSEUM (Museo Jumex) is at Av. Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra #303, next to the Soumaya Museum (M: Polanco, line 7). The three-story building housing this museum of contemporary art, despite a distinctive sawtooth roofline, lacks the Soumaya's strikingly postmodern visual impact. But the art within the Jumex (pronounced WHOmex)—the private collection of Eugenio López, art patron and heir to the Jumex fruit juice fortune—is every bit as strong, boasting such names as Andreas Gursky, Jeff Koons and Andy Warhol. Emphasis is given to Mexican artists as well, including Gabriel Orozco and Damián Ortega. Rotating special exhibitions are also presented.

**Note:** The museum is located in the northern part of the city, away from the Historic Center; if you would rather not use the Metro subway system, arrange for taxi transportation from your hotel. **Phone:** (55) 5395-2618.

PLAZA OF THE THREE CULTURES (Plaza de Las Tres Culturas) is 3 blks. n. of Paseo de la Reforma on Av. Lázaro Cárdenas, at the intersection with Ricardo Flores Magón (M: Tlatelolco, line 3); a taxi will take you to the entrance. The name comes from three vastly different influences-pre-Hispanic Aztec, colonial Spanish and contemporary Mexican—that have left their individual imprints on this plaza.

The ceremonial and trading center of Tlatelolco (tlahtay-LOHL-koh) considerably predated the Aztec capital of Tenochtitlan. Even after it was absorbed by the Aztec city in 1473, Tlatelolco continued to function as an important

market. It was from Tlatelolco that the Aztecs made their final stand against Spanish forces on Aug. 13, 1521.

Nearly 450 years later the plaza was the scene of another massacre. On the eve of the 1968 Summer Olympic Games—with Mexico City in the world spotlight—a massive student protest over prevailing economic and social policies turned deadly when government troops were ordered to open fire. A third tragedy occurred in the aftermath of the Sept. 19, 1985 earthquake, when a building in the vicinity collapsed and the plaza became a tent city for people left homeless by the guake.

The site ruins can be seen from raised walkways and give an indication of its former size. Off to one side is the Church of Santiago Tlatelolco, dating from 1609. Within the restored interior are several frescoes and a strikingly simple volcanic stone altar. Next to the church are the remains of a monastery and former college where Franciscan friars taught the sons of Aztec nobility. The adjacent high-rise building adds the modern note. Time: Allow 2 hours minimum.

SOUMAYA MUSEUM (Museo Soumaya) is at Av. Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra #303, in Plaza Carso (M: Polanco, line 7). Named in honor of his late wife, the Soumaya Museum showcases the eclectic art collection of businessman Carlos Slim, allegedly the world's richest man. The dramatic, free-form aluminum exterior is seven stories tall and resembles a Rodin sculpture. Inside, various exhibit halls display an enormous collection of lifesize sculptures, precious metals and framed art from across history and around the world.

Cultural displays feature valuable ceramics and crafts as well as utilitarian objects and implements. Most of the exhibits are very well illuminated and displayed on low stands for 360-degree viewing. Some sections are devoted to specific artists and artistic movements, such as Rodin and the Dutch Masters, while others focus on temporary exhibits. The blocks surrounding the museum, once economically depressed, now boast gleaming highrise office buildings and apartments, with Plaza Carso (named after Slim's holding company) as the centerpiece.

The museum is located in the northern part of the city, away from the Historic Center; if you would rather not use the Metro subway system, arrange for taxi transportation from your hotel. **Time:** Allow 3 hours minimum. **Phone:** (55) 1103-9800. **GT TI** 

**TEOTIHUACÁN**— see Teotihuacán listing p. 359.

#### West of Downtown

MONUMENT TO CUAUHTÉMOC (Monumento a Cuauhtémoc) stands at the intersection of Paseo de la Reforma and Av. Insurgentes (M: Insurgentes, line 1).

Cuauhtémoc, the last Aztec emperor, was tortured by Hernan Cortés in an unsuccessful attempt to force him to reveal the hiding place of the vast treasure of Moctezuma. The statue, created by 19th-century sculptor Miguel Norena, shows the proud ruler garbed in a plumed robe and standing imperiously with his spear, surrounded by warriors. Pedestal engravings depict Cuauhtémoc's torture and the burning of his feet.

REVOLUTION MONUMENT (Monumento a la Revolución) stands in the Plaza de la República, n. of Paseo de la Reforma and w. of Alameda Park (M: Revolución, line 2). Topped by an imposing copper dome that surmounts four arches, it rises 250 feet. Buried under the four columns are four former presidents—Venustiano Carranza, Plutarco Calles, Lázaro Cárdenas and Francisco I. Madero—as well as revolutionary Pancho Villa. Porfirio Díaz, the dictator deposed by the Revolution of 1910, intended for it to house the government's legislative offices, but the uprising halted construction; it was dedicated as a monument in the 1930s.

National Museum of the Revolution (Museo Nacional de la Revolución) is inside the lower part of the Revolution Monument. It houses a collection of weapons, along with paintings and sculptures depicting the revolution's leading figures. **Phone:** (55) 5566-1902.

SAN CARLOS NATIONAL MUSEUM (Museo Nacional de San Carlos) is about 3 blks. n. of Plaza de la República at Puente de Alvarado #50 (M: Revolución, line 2). It houses an impressive collection of paintings by European artists spanning the 15th through the 19th centuries, including works by Francisco José de Goya, Tintoretto, Titian, Anthony Van Dyck, Rembrandt and Peter Paul Rubens.

The lovely neoclassic building has a rotunda-like design and was once a private home for such notable Mexican military figures as Gen. Agustín de Iturbide and Gen. Antonio López de Santa Anna. There's a small public park behind the rear of the museum, off Puente de Alvarado. **Phone:** (55) 8647-5800 or (55) 5566-8085.

**STATUE OF COLUMBUS** stands within the *glorieta* (traffic circle) on Paseo de la Reforma at Av. Morelos (M: Revolución, line 2). The likeness of explorer Christopher Columbus (Cristóbal Colón in Spanish) was created by 19th-century French sculptor Charles Cordier. This is one of several statues commissioned by Porfirio Díaz to grace major intersections along this stretch of the city's widest boulevard.

#### South of Downtown

POLYFORUM SIQUEIROS is at Av. Insurgentes Sur #701 (at the corner of Av. Filadelfia), on the grounds of the World Trade Center Mexico building complex. Housed in a twelve-sided exposition hall, it is the work of muralist

David Alfaro Sigueiros (1896-1974). The vivid Sigueiros murals covering the building's exterior walls are not only a monument to the artist but make for a good photo opportunity. Inside, on the upper level, a revolving floor gives visitors an unimpeded look at the 26,150-square-foot ceiling mural "March of Humanity." A sound-and-light show is projected on the mural Saturdays and Sundays at noon and 2 p.m.

Note: The building is in the southern part of the city, a considerable distance away from the main tourist areas in the vicinity of Chapultepec Park; if you're a Siqueiros fan and want to see the art, take a taxi associated with your hotel and have the driver wait while you view the mural. Phone: (55) 5536-4520.

#### The Southern Suburbs

Churubusco, Coyoacán, Iztapalapa, San Angel, Tlalpan and Xochimilco, all within the Mexico City limits, were once individual pueblos (towns) that for the most part have maintained their own identities despite now being part of the City of Mexico, the 571-square-mile seat of national government.

North-south Avenida Insurgentes Sur is a direct line to the tourist hotspots of San Angel and Coyoacán. Restaurants, museums and weekend arts and crafts shopping make them a popular destination for visitors. Take a taxi; for an hourly fee you can hire a driver who will not only navigate the urban sprawl but wait while you shop or sightsee. For more information about these destinations, see their individual listings.

### What To Do

### Dinina

The most buzzed-about local restaurants in this sprawling city-elegant or otherwise-specialize in authentic Mexican cookery. This is not the cheese-slathered, chile-spiked food that many people think of as generically "Mexican," nor is it necessarily the regional specialties that have ended up on menus across the country as well as north of the border.

For one thing, ingredients are often exotic, like nopales, fleshy pads of cactus, or cajeta, a sweet caramel flavoring made from goat's milk. Menu items can be unusual, too: squash flowers, chapulines (grasshoppers), gusanos de maguey (worms) fried and served with guacamole. And street food comes in every imaginable form, including some choices that will challenge the most adventurous palate (tacos featuring meats like beef tongue or pig snouts).

If you're looking for a traditional fine-dining experience—with prices to match—the dependable choices are in the big, expensive hotels along Paseo de la Reforma or in the Polanco neighborhood north of Chapultepec Park. You'll likely need reservations, and jackets are suggested for men.

The Mexican chains Vips and Sanborns have locations throughout the city and are good for a casual meal. Another casual alternative is the taco stands found on almost every street corner. Tacos al pastor, shreds of roast pork, grilled onions and cilantro heaped on a small tortilla, cost around 15 pesos apiece and are a popular late-night snack.

The El Globo bakery chain, with locations throughout Mexico, offers good-quality breads and pastries at low prices. For the homesick there are plenty of American fast-food outlets, including Burger King, McDonald's, Pizza Hut and Subway.

Reservations are needed for trendy and popular restaurants in the Polanco, Zona Rosa, Condesa and Roma neighborhoods. Another cluster of good restaurants and cozy sidewalk cafes are in the southern suburbs of San Angel and Coyoacán. Casual, family-style places are the rule in the vicinity of the Zócalo. Many restaurants close on Sunday.

Approach cocktails and liquors with caution if you are not used to the altitude. Also be aware that imported wines and spirits are heavily taxed; Mexican beers and wines are much less expensive. Although the better restaurants typically use purified water, avoid green salads, unpeeled raw vegetables and unpeeled fruit if you have a sensitive stomach. To be completely safe order drinks without ice cubes, or drink bottled water.

Restaurants often cater to the local custom of eating the main meal of the day in the early afternoon, then a lighter supper around 9 p.m. or later. Most begin to serve breakfast around 7:30 a.m., comida (lunch) about 1 p.m. and dinner after 7:30 p.m. From 2 to 4, restaurants can be crowded with a lingering lunch crowd; if you eat dinner before 9 p.m., on the other hand, you might have the place to yourself.

Don't expect every server to be fluent in English. A knowledge of basic Spanish or a handy phrase book not only helps in communication but also in deciphering menus.

### Shopping

The Zona Rosa, off Paseo de la Reforma and encompassing calles Amberes, Génova, Hamburgo, Niza and Londres (M: Sevilla or Insurgentes, line 1) is a popular tourist shopping destination. In more recent years nightlife has become the bigger draw, but during the day the Zona Rosa offers a pleasant atmosphere for exploring fashion boutiques and shops selling crafts and antiques.

Plaza del Angel, on Calle Hamburgo between Florencia and Amberes, has the biggest concentration of antique shops in the city. Collectors and sellers from around the metropolitan area converge on the plaza's Saturday antique market.

A more exclusive shopping area is the Polanco neighborhood (M: Polanco, line 7). Cartier, Hugo Boss, Louis Vuitton and other chic fashion retailers line nine blocks of Avenida Presidente Masaryk between Avenida Moliere and Avenida Tennyson, a stretch that is Mexico City's version of L.A.'s Rodeo Drive.

Spreading east from the eastern end of Chapultepec Park is Colonia Condesa (M: Juanacatlan, line 1), a pedestrian-friendly neighborhood filled with browsing opportunities. Some of the trendiest boutiques are concentrated near the intersection of avenidas Michoacán and Atlixco and along Avenida Tamaulipas. Avenida Michoacán also has retail outlets selling clothes and other merchandise.

Condesa's tree-shaded Parque México, with twin fountains and winding, bench-dotted walkways, is a pleasant spot to take a shopping break. The park is encircled by Avenida Amsterdam, a wide, lushly landscaped boulevard lined with handsome Art Deco-style homes and sprinkled with cafés and places to eat. Stop for coffee at Milo's, Av. Amsterdam #308, a casual bistro with sidewalk tables. Chocoholics will want to make a beeline for Tout Chocolat, Av. Amsterdam #154, where the decadent confections include brownies, salted caramel chocolate candies, mezcal-flavored truffles with sea salt and a rich, not-too-sweet, cinnamon-infused cup of Mexican hot chocolate.

East of Condesa across Avenida Insurgentes is Colonia Roma (M: Insurgentes, line 1), another trendy neighborhood known for its shops and local restaurants. The city's young hipsters flock to the 180 Shop, Av. Colima #180 (a block south of Plaza Río de Janeiro), for backpacks, skateboards, designer sneakers and cool clothes from upand-coming young designers.

Hundreds of shops and vendor stalls line avenidas Juárez and Francisco I. Madero in the vicinity of the Zócalo. From the Zócalo west to Avenida Lázaro Cárdenas, every other side street is closed to traffic and paved with brick tiles. Government-run FONART stores sell a variety of arts and crafts from all over Mexico—rugs, glassware, folk art, pottery—at reasonable prices. A centrally located store, Tienda Juárez, is at Av. Juárez #89 (between Calle de Balderas and Avenida Humboldt), just west of Alameda Park (M: Hidalgo, line 2).

The Mexican restaurant chain Sanborns has numerous locations throughout Mexico City, including the flagship location in the House of Tiles (see attraction listing) and several along Paseo de la Reforma and in the Zona Rosa.

Almost all branches have an attached store that is a convenient place to pick up toiletries and English-language publications, as well as quality craft items and ceramics. Many also have a pharmacy and an ATM.

Mexico City's suburban shopping malls require a drive, making them generally inconvenient if you're on vacation. If you love mall shopping, however, consider hiring a driver to take you there and wait while you look around.

Centro Santa Fe is on the city's southwestern outskirts at Av. Prolongación Vasco de Quiroga #3800, about 17 kilometers (10 miles) from downtown Mexico City. To get there, take Avenida Constituyentes to Paseo de la Reforma/Mex. 134-D/Mex. 15-D (toll), then take the exit marked "U Iberoamericana/Comercio Santa Fe." It has nearly 300 stores, movie theaters, restaurants and play areas for kids.

Another big mall is Centro Comercial Perisur, one of the city's oldest. It's located in the southern suburb of San Angel, close to where the Periférico expressway crosses Avenida Insurgentes Sur (just south of the National University of Mexico). Centro Comercial Oasis Coyoacán, Av. Miguel Angel de Quevedo #217 (M: Miguel A. de Quevedo, line 3), is in the southern suburb of Coyoacán. This open-air mall has a food court and sit-down restaurants in addition to the usual mall franchise stores.

México está en los mercados. The soul of Mexico City can indeed be found in its markets; more than 300 of them operate in government-owned buildings, and this doesn't include the innumerable *tianguis*, open-air set-ups that operate on the same day every week. A trip to a market is one of the top things to do in Mexico City.

Foodies should head to the San Juan Market (Mercado de Curiosidades San Juan; the official name is Ernesto Pugibet), 4 blocks south of Alameda Park at Calle Ayuntamiento and Avenida Dolores (M: Salto de Agua, line 8). In business more than 150 years, it sells produce, fruit, cheeses and seafood—the fresh fish market is huge—as well as lots of imported items and exotic culinary products. Freshly butchered meats range from turkey, rabbit and goat to crocodile and armadillo. For tourists this a great lunch stop; numerous food vendors dish up all sorts of authentic specialties, from pozole to tortas. It's open daily 7-5.

The city's biggest food market is the La Merced Market, about six blocks southeast of the Zócalo between Anillo de Circunvalación and Calle Rosario (M: Merced, line 1). The huge building is divided into sections focusing on specific items or foodstuffs. Here vendor after vendor sells nothing but *nopal* (cactus pads) or *chicharrónes* (fried pork rinds). Other areas specialize in wedding decorations, cooking utensils, shoes and clothing. It's definitely not a tourist attraction, but the sheer scope of the commerce (mountains of candy, enormous bags of potato chips) makes it one of

the fascinating and fun places to go for a full immersion in local culture. It's open daily 8-7; go during the day, as the neighborhood gets sketchy after dark.

Two blocks south of Mercado de la Merced on Calle Fray Servando Teresa de Mier (M: Merced, line 1) is Mercado Sonora, otherwise known as the "witchcraft market." Stalls sell a mishmash of lotions, potions, colorful candles, charms, amulets, aromatic soaps and herbal remedies all touting success in business, good health, luck in love or stress reduction. There's a huge variety of medicinal plants, along with exotica like dried rattlesnake and starfish that are reputed to help relieve various ailments. You'll also find more utilitarian items like pottery, piñatas, toys and party costumes. It's open daily 10-7.

The Mercado Insurgentes de Artesanías y Platería fills an entire block in the Zona Rosa along Calle Londres between calles Florencia and Amberes (M: Insurgentes, line 1). This neighborhood crafts market has a maze of stalls selling everything from baskets and textiles to silver, pewterware, jewelry, sombreros and souvenirs. Bargaining is expected and good buys are possible, but most vendors speak little English so it helps to know some basic Spanish phrases if you plan on haggling. It's open Mon.-Sat. 10-7, Sun. 11-4.

Handcrafted items from all over the country are sold at the Mercado de la Ciudadela, about 5 blocks southwest of Alameda Park along Calle Balderas, between calles Ayuntamiento and Emilio Donde (M: Balderas, line 1). Covered booths display leather moccasins, Talavera pottery, custom-made stringed instruments and more. Some of the coolest items are vibrantly colorful, hand-carved wooden masks. If you travel to just one crafts market, make it this one. Most stalls have fixed prices. It's open daily around 10-7. There's a nice little plaza across the street from the market.

The La Lagunilla Market is two blocks east of the intersection of Lázaro Cárdenas and Paseo de la Reforma, bordered north and south by Calle Libertad and Calle López Rayón and east and west by avenidas Ignacio Allende and Comonfort (M: Lagunilla, line 8). A triple-domed building of enormous proportions, Lagunilla is especially busy on Sunday, when vendors from all over the city set up tables or booths to sell furniture, antiques, used clothing, vinyl records, old books, elaborate wedding dresses and housewares. You won't find souvenirs here, and watch out for pickpockets.

Silver fanciers should visit Tane, at the corner of Avenida Presidente Masaryk and Calle Edgar Allan Poe in the Polanco district. Jewelry, candelabras and museum-quality reproductions are all expensive but exquisitely crafted.

Mexican artists exhibit and sell their work at El Bazar Sábado (Saturday Bazaar) in San Angel. It takes place Saturdays from 10-7 in a beautifully renovated 18thcentury mansion at Plaza San Jacinto #11 (M: Miguel A. de Quevedo, line 3), but usually spills out of it as well.

The emphasis here is on art and features works by a tightly knit group of contemporary artisans, some of them U.S. expats. Paintings, sculpture, ceramics, textiles, garments, rugs and high-quality jewelry are sold; prices are high, but so is quality. Search out the *animalitos*, bizarrely carved and painted wooden creatures for which Oaxaca is famous, and "Tree of Life" candelabras exploding with flowers, animals and other figures.

Gilded statues of the Virgin Mary, Our Lady of Guadalupe and other Mexican patron saints are exquisite examples of handiwork and command high prices. More affordable merchandise—and a greater chance to bargain—can be found outside the bazaar, where merchants offer wooden toys, decorative gourds and beaded bracelets. Local artists exhibit their work, and the lively scene frequently includes dancers and other entertainment.

### Sightseeing

Mexico City's enormous size makes it difficult to plan a sightseeing itinerary. Although many museums and other fun places to go are concentrated in certain areas—the Historic Center, Chapultepec Park, the southern suburbs of San Angel and Coyoacán—getting to them can take time and effort.

The best day to sightsee is Sunday, when many attractions and things to do are free. Another good reason to plan your sightseeing for Sunday is that Paseo de Reforma's traffic lanes are closed to motor vehicles for 6 hours (from 8 a.m. to 2 p.m.). The pedestrian-only stretch extends from Chapultepec Park to the Zócalo, a distance of about 3 miles.

People navigate the boulevard in every type of nonmotorized wheeled conveyance you can imagine. Vendors sell "jicamasicles"; the native Mexican vine's edible, tuberous root is cut into thick slices that are squirted with fresh lime juice and sprinkled with cayenne pepper for a snack that is simultaneously cool, spicy and refreshing. Numerous kiosks provide free bike rentals (with your driver's license left as a deposit). This is an ideal opportunity to view Reforma's gleaming skyscrapers and landmarks like the Revolution Monument without the distraction of ceaseless traffic congestion and honking horns.

If the prospect of hitting the streets and facing travel on your own still seems too stressful, consider taking a guided tour. Check with the concierge at your hotel, which may either have its own travel agency or be able to recommend a reliable one. An alternative is to visit one of the city's tourist information modules (Módulo de Información v Orientación Turística) operated by SECTUR. You'll find

them in the Historic Center and the Zona Rosa, along Paseo de la Reforma and in the vicinity of Alameda and Chapultepec parks.

Turibus is a convenient way to see the city sights on vacation while someone else does the driving. Each red, double-decker bus holds up to 70 passengers, and tours include a simultaneous translation in several languages.

There are two routes. One takes in the Historic Center, Paseo de la Reforma, Chapultepec Park and the Condesa and Roma neighborhoods—an area filled with museums, monuments, art galleries, parks and restaurants. One ticket allows you to use the service all day, disembarking and reboarding at 19 stops. The Southside Tour includes 18 stops and covers points of interest on the National University of Mexico campus, several shopping malls, Coyoacán's historic main plaza and the Frida Kahlo Museum.

Turibuses run daily 9-9 and pass each stop approximately every half hour. For either tour, tickets Mon.-Fri. cost 140 pesos; ages 4-11, 70 pesos. Tickets Sat.-Sun. cost 165 pesos; ages 4-11, 85 pesos. For more information check with your hotel or at a tourist information module.

Another easy way to sightsee is to have your hotel arrange for a private car and a guide, either by the hour or by the day. Although you'll pay for the convenience, this option allows greater flexibility and more personal service. The larger hotels should be able to arrange such an excursion; check with the concierge.

### Sports and Recreation

In addition to the spectator sports mentioned below, Mexico City offers basketball games, boxing matches and a growing collegiate schedule of American-style football that may coincide with your vacation. Your hotel concierge can help you get tickets.

**Soccer** (fútbol) is played almost every weekend by the big leagues at Azteca Stadium, in the southern part of the city on Calzada de Tlalpan, north of the Periférico Sur. Shuttles are available from the Taxqueña Metro station (line 2). There are winter (August to December) and summer (January to May) seasons. The city's most popular team, América—nicknamed Las Aguilas (the Eagles)—draws huge crowds, especially when they play arch-rival Guadalajara in a match called El Clásico.

The National University of Mexico-sponsored Pumas play soccer at Olympic Stadium (Estadio Olímpica) on the National University of Mexico campus. The oval design somewhat resembles the crater of a volcano. A Diego Rivera mosaic of colored rocks, illustrating human endeavor in sports, covers the stadium's sloping walls. Tickets for all games are normally available right up to game time and range from about \$10 to \$20 (U.S.).

Almost as popular as soccer is wrestling. Mexico's version of professional wrestling is called *lucha libre* (literally "freestyle wrestling"), and it's a flamboyant spectacle indeed, with in-the-ring theatrics on par with those served up by the WWE in the states. In addition to spandex tights, *luchadores* wear colorful masks, and the wrestlers keep them on even when out in public, thereby masking their identities. You'll see *lucha libre* masks for sale at practically every souvenir stand in the country.

Typical matches pit *técnicos* (good guys) against *rudos* (bad guys) in a flurry of flying dropkicks and other spectacular maneuvers. There are also female wrestlers (luchadoras) and short-statured competitors (los minis). And just like north of the border, the personas, feuds and over-the-top stunts are all meticulously choreographed, although the athletic ability on display is quite evident.

The best place to enjoy an evening of lucha libre is Arena México, Calle Dr. Lavista #189, Colonia Doctores (M: Cuauhtémoc, line 1), about nine blocks southwest of Alameda Park. The arena is a bit run-down, but that's all part of the fun. Vendors sell beer and wildly enthusiastic fans cheer on their favorites. Ringside seats cost more, but you'll be at the center of the action. Tickets can be purchased at the door or in advance through Ticketmaster; phone (55) 5325-9000. Matches featuring big names sell out quickly. Note: The neighborhood is on the sketchy side, so don't bring any valuables or hang around the arena afterward.

Teams in the Mexican League play baseball from the beginning of April through mid-September. Games are announced in Spanish, but little is lost in the translation as the rules are the same. Some key terms: el lanzador is the pitcher, la entrada is the inning, pegar means hit, un sencillo is a single.

The Diablos Rojos del México (Mexico City Red Devils) play at Estadio Alfredo Harp Helú, in the eastern part of the city, adjacent to the Formula One auto racing complex. The season runs from April through mid-August. General admission seats are inexpensive, less than \$5 (U.S.). Tickets can be purchased through Ticketmaster.

Horse races are held at the lovely Hippodrome of the Americas (Hipódromo de las Américas). The track is in the northwestern part of the city between avenidas del Conscripto and Industria Militar, just west of Boulevard Manuel Avila Camacho. Races are held Friday through Sunday throughout the year; first post times are 2 p.m. on Friday and Saturday and 1 p.m. on Sunday.

General section admission is 20 pesos; box seats are more expensive. Bets start at six pesos. Amenities include fast-food outlets, a sports book facility and a fashionable restaurant, The Turf Club.

**Tennis** and **golf** clubs are typically for members only. If your heart's set on playing tennis, it's best to stay at a hotel that offers courts. The Bella Vista Golf Club (Club de Golf Bellavista) is northwest of the city off Av. de los Arcos. to Av. Valle Verde #52. In addition to an 18-hole course, the club offers rental carts, caddies, a pro shop and a clubhouse. Greens fees range from around \$65 on weekdays to \$125 on weekends. For additional information or to make a reservation for a tee time, phone (55) 5366-8050.

### Nightlife

A night out on the town in Mexico City often means hitting a nightclub or spending the evening at a lobby bar in one of the big hotels. A nightclub tour is an easy and safe way to visit some of the city's hot spots, since transportation and reservations are pre-arranged for you. These tours usually last several hours and include dinner at a nice restaurant and perhaps a show or a stop at famed Plaza Garibaldi. Check with your hotel's concierge service for tour recommendations or ask your AAA travel agent for help with planning a nightclub tour.

For a retreat high above the crowded streets and breathtaking views of the capital, find a rooftop bar. You can start the night off with a drink or make an evening of it and have dinner as well. Most rooftop bars are open late, especially on Friday and Saturday evenings.

Miralto, on the 41st floor of the Latin-American Tower, serves cocktails and martinis and has a dinner menu heavy on Italian, French and Spanish influences. Bellini, on the 45th floor of the World Trade Center building (Torre WTC) at Avenida Insurgentes Sur and Calle Montecito, bills itself as the world's biggest revolving restaurant. The panoramic city views are usually complemented by live entertainment in the form of a pianist or a jazz band.

Area Bar, on the top floor of the Habita Hotel, Av. Presidente Masaryk #201 in Polanco, morphs from a pool lounge area by day to an upscale bar after the sun goes down, with comfortable seating and an outdoor fireplace for chilly evenings. Balmori Roofbar, Calle Zacatecas #139 in the Roma neighborhood, is architecturally innovative, with minimalist décor, greenery and a paneled roof that opens up when the weather's warm. Cool DJ music attracts a well-dressed crowd of twenty-somethings, and the line to get in can be long.

Cantinas, small, dimly lit places usually filled with harddrinking patrons, should be avoided for the most part in Mexico City. One exception, however, is La Opera Bar, Av. 5 de Mayo #10 at Calle Providencia. During the day this is a crowded lunch spot, with jacketed waiters and formal service. In the evening dinner is served, but the gilded ceiling, mirrored walls, dark paneled booths and clubby feel also make La Opera a popular spot for an early evening cocktail. Your waiter is likely to show you the bullet hole Pancho Villa supposedly once fired into the ceiling.

Colonia Condesa provides a more laid-back neighborhood setting for evening socializing than the Historic Center. Salón Malafama, Calle Michoacán #78, is a casual hangout with pool tables downstairs and tables upstairs where you can play chess or dominoes. Fever, Av. Nuevo León #67 (near Parque España), is a club with a retro '70s disco vibe that attracts dolled-up crowds who come to dance to DJ-spun house, funk and soul music.

El Hijo del Cuervo, Calle Jardín Centenario #17 in Coyoacán, is frequented by hip students and a mix of locals and foreigners. This bar and restaurant has an outdoor terrace and is located right on Jardín Centenario, Coyoacán's plaza, which makes it a perfect spot to chill with sangria or a beer and people-watch. Sip a traditional margarita and listen to a mariachi band at Bar Jorongo at Paseo de la Reforma #325. The bar has a cover charge.

If you're seeking a true Mexican nightlife experience, head to Plaza Garibaldi. Between calles República de Peru and República de Honduras, about 5 blocks north of the Palace of Fine Arts (M: Garibaldi, line 8), this square is ruled by mariachi bands who serenade paying customers every night of the week. The typical band setup includes a violin, trumpet, guitar and a heart-tugging vocalist who almost always sings about the struggles of love.

Decked out in tight-fitting, silver-spangled costumes and wide-brimmed sombreros, the musicians unabashedly solicit business from the throngs of people crowding the plaza (about \$5 U.S. for a song). Sunday night is the best time to hear music in the square itself. Mariachis also perform in the surrounding cantinas and clubs, which stay open into the wee hours. If you're wondering where to eat near Plaza Garibaldi, the restaurant and nightclub Salón Tenampa, on the north side of the plaza, puts on first-rate mariachi shows. At other establishments you can sit and listen to the mariachis while nibbling botanas (snacks).

Plaza Garibaldi is at its most lively late at night and is a traditional last stop for an evening on the town, but the surrounding neighborhood has long been a sketchy one, filled with cheap hotels and gaudy burlesque theaters. In recent years an overhaul spruced up both the plaza and the surrounding blocks. Even so, guard your belongings against pickpockets, and arrange for round-trip taxi transportation from your hotel. Some places will try to gouge money from tourists by raising quoted prices for food and drinks, so stick to the larger, well-known establishments.

**Note:** Always be careful when venturing out after dark anywhere in Mexico City, even in tourist-centric areas like the Zona Rosa and Polanco. The Metro is not recommended as a way of getting around at night, and you

should never hail a taxi on the street. The safest way to travel is to make drop-off and pickup arrangements with your hotel taxi service. Thieves also frequent the popular nightlife districts, so carry a minimum of cash and watch your personal belongings carefully.

#### **Concerts**

Your hotel or AAA travel agent may be able to help you reserve advance tickets for such popular performances as those given by the Ballet Folklórico de México. Tickets for many performing arts events and popular music concerts can also be purchased through Ticketmaster.

The Palace of Fine Arts (M: Bellas Artes, lines 2 and 8) is the home of the National Symphony Orchestra. The National Opera Company also stages productions here, usually January through March and August through October. The Mexico City Philharmonic Orchestra (Orquestra Filarmónica de la Ciudad de México) gives concerts at Silvestre Revueltas Hall (Sala Silvestre Revueltas) and makes for a romantic date night. It is located at Anillo Periférico Sur #5141 (just east of Avenida Insurgentes Sur) in the southern suburb of Tlalpan.

International symphony, ballet and opera companies also perform at the National Auditorium (Auditorio Nacional), Paseo de la Reforma #50 in Chapultepec Park (M: Auditorio, line 7). There is a Ticketmaster outlet in the building.

The acclaimed National University Symphony hosts its concert program at Justo Sierra Auditorium (M: Universidad, line 3, south terminal), on the National University of Mexico campus. The hall is famed for its acoustics. Nezahualcoyotl Hall regularly presents performing artists and groups, including the University of Mexico Philharmonic Orchestra. It is located within the University Cultural Center, off Avenida Insurgentes Sur south of the main campus buildings.

Music al fresco can be heard on the street or at parks throughout the capital. Better yet, many of these performances—which range from mariachi music to heavy metal—are free. Sunday concerts often take place in Alameda Park, usually around noon, and near the Lake House (Casa del Lago) in Chapultepec Park. The main plazas in Coyoacán and San Angel often are the scene of weekend musical offerings.

International pop, rock and hip-hop acts take the stage at the National Auditorium; at the Sports Palace (Palacio de Los Deportes), in the eastern part of the city off avenidas Río Churubusco and Viaducto Río de la Piedad (M: Velódromo, line 9); and at Parque Foro Sol stadium, across Avenida Río Churubusco from the Sports Palace.

The state-of-the-art Mexico City Arena (Arena Ciudad de México) is in the northwestern part of the city off Avenida de las Granjas, Colonia Azcapotzalco. With a seating capacity of just over 22,000, it presents major pop and rock concerts. ice skating shows, circuses, and occasional boxing matches and NBA exhibition games. For a full lineup of events, check the arena's page on ticketmaster.com.mx.

The Ballet Folklórico de México (see Palace of Fine Arts attraction listing) is one of the standout offerings in Mexico City. Although tickets are sold in advance at the Palace of Fine Arts box office (on the ground floor at the main entrance), they may be difficult to obtain unless you purchase them at least a day ahead or book a tour that includes the ballet. **Note:** The troupe occasionally moves to the National Auditorium or the National Museum of Anthropology to accommodate visiting performing arts groups. Check the Ticketmaster website for specific schedule information.

Another eagerly anticipated event is the annual series of performances of Tchaikovsky's classic ballet "Swan Lake" at Chapultepec Park. Lago Menor, just south of Lake Chapultepec, provides a watery backdrop for the evening performances by Mexico's renowned Compañía Nacional de Danza troupe. Performances begin at 8 p.m. Wednesday through Sunday from late February to late March. Amphitheater seats range from 160-200 pesos and should be reserved in advance. You can purchase tickets at the Palace of Fine Arts box office and at booths at the Del Bosque Cultural Center (Centro Cultural del Bosque) complex, within the park off Paseo de la Reforma and Calzada Chivatito.

#### Theater and Cinema

Theaters are located throughout Mexico City. While plays are almost always performed in Spanish, some theaters present shows in a cabaret or variety format that can be enjoyed by those who don't speak Spanish.

The Insurgentes Theater (Teatro de Los Insurgentes), in the southern part of the city at Av. Insurgentes Sur #1587 (at Calle Mercaderes), has a striking Diego Rivera mosaic on the facade and presents touring productions of plays and musicals. The Blanquita Theater (Teatro Blanquita), 3 blocks north of Alameda Park at Av. Eje Central Lázaro Cárdenas #16 (M: Bellas Artes, lines 2 and 8), offers variety shows performed by Mexico's top singers, dancers, comedians and magicians. To see if any shows coincide with your trip, check the schedules on ticketmaster.com.mx.

Other theaters include the Teatro Hidalgo Ignacio Retes, across from the northeast corner of Alameda Park at Av. Hidalgo #23 (M: Hidalgo, line 2); and the Centroids Cultural Virginia Fábregas, Calle Joaquín Velasquez de León #29, about 20 blocks west of Alameda Park (M: Normal, line 2).

American and foreign films are shown in their original language with Spanish subtitles, although some children's movies are dubbed in Spanish; ask when you buy your tickets. Hollywood blockbusters and first-run films open in Mexico soon after they do in the United States, and admission is inexpensive (about \$6 U.S.), which makes a trip to the movies a good option for a rainy day. The Spanish-language *Tiempo Libre* magazine, available at newsstands, has entertainment listings.

Cineteca Nacional is at Av. México-Coyoacán #389 in the southern suburb of Coyoacán, about 5 blocks north of the Frida Kahlo Museum (M: Coyoacán, line 3). This multiplex destination offers a wide range of movie choices, with halfprice admission on Wednesday; phone (55) 4155-1200. Closer to the city center is Cinépolis Diana, Paseo de la Reforma #423 (4 blocks west of the Independence Monument); phone (55) 2122-6060. Cinemex Reforma Casa de Arte, Av. Río Guadalquivir #104 (a block north of Paseo de la Reforma and a block northwest of the Independence Monument), shows Mexican and Hollywood films as well as art house productions from around the world; for recorded schedule information phone (55) 5257-6969.

### Special Events

Flower-garlanded cows, dogs and cats wearing ribbons and irreverent roosters are paraded on January 17 for the Feast of San Antonio de Abad, or the "blessing of the animals." This whimsical ceremony takes place at the Metropolitan Cathedral on the Zócalo. Holy Week (Semana Santa) celebrations begin on Palm Sunday and are most prominent on Maundy Thursday, Good Friday and Easter Sunday.

On May 1, Labor Day (Día del Trabajo), the president reviews a huge parade of workers from the central balcony of the National Palace. For the Feast of Corpus Christi, families dress children in native costumes or their Sunday best and gather at the Metropolitan Cathedral for

a priest's blessing. The date is variable, occurring between late May and mid-June.

The fall of the Aztec city of Tenochtitlan to Hernando Cortés and his followers is remembered Aug. 2 on Cuauhtémoc Day. Dances and wreath-laying ceremonies at the Plaza of the Three Cultures and the Cuauhtémoc Statue at the intersection of Paseo de la Reforma and Avenida Insurgentes honor the last Aztec emperor.

Father Miguel Hidalgo's "El Grito de Dolores." the rallying cry of Mexican independence, is repeated by the president of Mexico and echoed by hundreds of thousands of people on the evening of Sept. 15 in Plaza Constitución (the Zócalo). One of the year's biggest events, it is nationally televised. A morning military parade on Independence Day, Sept. 16, proceeds from the Zócalo to the Independence Monument, past buildings draped with streamers in the national colors of red, green and white.

Columbus Day (Día de la Raza) on Oct. 12 commemorates Christopher Columbus' discovery of the Americas. Families build altars in their homes and decorate the graves of loved ones with extravagant flower garlands to celebrate the Day of the Dead on Nov. 1. Revolution Day, Nov. 20, features a spirited downtown parade along avenidas Madero and Juárez and Paseo de la Reforma to commemorate the start of the Revolution of 1910.

The venerated Virgin of Guadalupe, the country's patron saint, is the focal point of a nationwide celebration of dancing, fireworks and religious processions on Dec. 12, the Feast Day of the Virgin of Guadalupe. Devout believers from throughout Mexico make the pilgrimage to the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe, in the northern suburb of Villa de Guadalupe. The city is decorated in high style for the 9 days leading up to Christmas, a time devoted to traditional re-enactments of the Holy Family's search for an inn (posada).

### **MEXICO CITY, CITY OF MEXICO**

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### CAMINO REAL POLANCO MEXICO CITY BOOK NOW 55/5263-8888



Classic Historic Hotel. Address: Mariano Escobedo No 700 Col Nueva Anzures 11590. Facility: This large, distinguished hotel was designed by architect Ricardo Legorreta to resemble an Aztec pyramid and is the flagship property of the upscale Mexican chain. Guest rooms are noticeably spacious. Meets AAA quest room security requirements. 712 units, some two bedrooms and kitchens. 5 stories, interior corridors. Parking: on-site (fee) and valet. Amenities: safes. Dining: 4 restaurants. Pool: heated outdoor. Activities: exercise room. Guest Services: valet laundry.























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SAVE Hotel. Address: Antonio Dovali Jaime 70 01219.

### HOLIDAY INN EXPRESS MÉXICO REFORMA

**BOOK NOW** 55/9150-5900



Hotel. Address: Paseo de La Reforma No 208 Col Juárez 06600. Location: Next to Reforma 222 shopping complex. Facility: Meets AAA guest room security requirements. 120 units. 14 stories, interior corridors. Bath: shower only. Parking: valet only. Amenities: safes. Activities: exercise room. Guest Services: valet laundry.

















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Extended Stay Hotel. Address: Prol Vasco de Quiroga 4001, Santa Fe Cuajimelpa 05348. Facility: Meets AAA guest room security requirements. 119 units, some efficiencies. 12-19 stories, interior corridors. Parking: on-site (fee). Amenities: safes. Pool: heated outdoor. Activities: exercise room. Guest Services: valet and coin laundry.





























### HYATT REGENCY MEXICO CITY BOOK NOW 55/5083-1234





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Hotel. Address: Campos Eliseos 204 Col Polanco Chapultepec 11560. Facility: Multiple art exhibits decorate the lobby of this high-rise hotel, which provides a full array of business and leisure facilities. The guest rooms are tastefully appointed. Meets AAA guest room security requirements. 755 units. 43 stories, interior corridors. Parking: on-site (fee) and valet. Amenities: safes. Dining: 3 restaurants. Pool: heated indoor. Activities: sauna, steamroom, tennis, health club, massage. Guest Services: valet laundry.































### HYATT REGENCY MEXICO CITY INSURGENTES BOOK NOW 55/5724-7700





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Contemporary Hotel. **Address:** Av de Los Insurgentes Sur 724. Facility: This high-rise hotel exudes style, class and comfort. The guest rooms offer the latest technology and modern designer materials. Upgrade to the executive floor for the optimal experience. 201 units. 14 stories, interior corridors. Bath: shower only. Parking: valet only. Amenities: safes. Dining: 2 restaurants. Activities: exercise room, massage. Guest Services: valet laundry, area transportation.





























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SAVE Hotel. Address: Andres Bello No 29 11560.



JW MARRIOTT MEXICO CITY SANTA FE BOOK NOW 55/5292-7272



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SAVE Hotel. Address: Avenida Santa Fe 160, Col Santa Fe 01219.



### KIMPTON VIRGILIO BOOK NOW 55/9156-0500



Historic Boutique Hotel. Address: Anatole France 79, Polanco. Facility: This standout hotel has a commanding position in the vibrant neighborhood of Polanco. The stylishly hip guest rooms offer plush comforts and a plethora of technology conveniences. 48 units. 4 stories, interior corridors. Parking: valet only. Terms: check-in 4 pm. Amenities: safes. Dining: 2 restaurants. Pool: heated outdoor. Activities: bicycles, exercise room. Guest

Services: valet laundry.



















LE MERIDIEN MEXICO CITY BOOK NOW 55/5061-3000



## Le MERIDIEN AAA Benefit: Members save 5% or more and earn Marriott Bonvoy<sup>™</sup> points when booking AAA/CAA rates!

Hotel. Address: 69 Paseo de La Reforma, Col Tabacalera 06030. Facility: On a bustling, attractive boulevard, this architecturally distinct hotel offers guest rooms with spacious seating areas; some with dramatic views of the city. Meets AAA guest room security requirements. 160 units. 19 stories, interior corridors. Parking: valet only. Amenities: safes. Pool: heated indoor. Activities: hot tub, exercise room. Guest Services: valet laundry.



































## MEXICO CITY MARRIOTT REFORMA BOOK NOW 55/1102-7030



AAA Benefit: Members save 5% or more and earn Marriott Bonvoy<sup>™</sup> points when booking AAA/CAA rates!

Hotel. Address: Paseo de La Reforma 276 Col Juárez 06600. Location: MARRIOTT 421. Facility: For business and leisure travelers alike, this upscale hotel offers refined public areas and stylish yet modest size guest rooms and

bathrooms. The executive floor lounge offers incredible views. Meets AAA quest room security requirements. 322 units. 16 stories, interior corridors. Parking: on-site (fee) and valet. Amenities: safes. Dining: 2 restaurants, entertainment. Pool: heated indoor. Activities: sauna, hot tub, steamroom, exercise room, spa. Guest Services: valet





























### MY NH COLLECTION MEXICO CITY CENTRO HISTÓRICO

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55/5130-1850



















Hotel. Address: Palma 42 Centro 06000. Facility: Meets AAA quest room security











THREE DIAMOND

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SAVE Contemporary Hotel. Address: Av Paseo de la Reforma 509 06500.



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SAVE Contemporary Hotel. Address: Paseo de La Reforma 439, Col Cuauhtemoc 06500.



SOFITEL MEXICO CITY REFORMA BOOK NOW 55/8660-0500

Contemporary Hotel. Address: Av Paseo de la Reforma 297, Col Cua 06500.



FOUR DIAMOND



UMBRAL, CURIO COLLECTION BY HILTON BOOK NOW 55/1203-2600





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Historic Hotel. Address: Calle de Venustiano Carranza 69. Facility: Designed by a renowned architect, this structure dates back to 1924 and has a bevy of captivating elements. Guest rooms are decked out with plush comforts and enhanced technology. 59 units. 6 stories, interior corridors. Parking: on-site (fee). Amenities: safes. Dining: 5 restaurants. Pool: heated outdoor. Activities: hot tub, exercise room. Guest Services: valet laundry.



























FOUR DIAMOND INSPECTED @ CLEAN



55/4359-9021

Boutique Hotel. Address: Rio Volga 105 Cuahtemoc.



THE WESTIN SANTA FE MEXICO CITY BOOK NOW 55/5089-8000



AAA Benefit: Members save 5% or more and earn Marriott Bonvov<sup>™</sup> points when booking AAA/CAA rates!

Hotel. Address: Javier Barros Sierra 540 Lomas Santa Fe 01219. Facility: Meets AAA quest room security requirements. 259 units. 11 stories, interior corridors. Parking: on-site (fee) and valet. Amenities: safes. Pool: heated outdoor. Activities: hot tub, steamroom, health club, spa. Guest Services: valet laundry.

























W MEXICO CITY

**BOOK NOW** 55/9138-1800



AAA Benefit: Members save 5% or more and earn Marriott Bonvoy™ points when booking AAA/CAA rates!

SAVE Contemporary Hotel. Address: Campos Eliseos 252 Col Polanco 11560.

#### WHERE TO EAT



ALMARA 55/5230-1766



Fusion Fine Dining. Address: Calle Hamburgo and Versuvia, Col Juárez 06600.







Regional French Seafood Fine Dining. Address: Campos Eliseos 218 Col Polanco 11560.



FOUR DIAMOND

New Mexican Fine Dining. Address: 133 Tennyson, Col Polanco 11570.



QUATTRO GASTRONOMIA ITALIANO 55/9177-9727



Northern Italian Fine Dining. Address: Avenida Santa Fe 160, Col Santa Fe 01219.



RESTAURANT DIANA 55/5228-1818



International Fine Dining. Address: Paseo de La Reforma 439, Col Cuauhtemoc 06500.

### TEOTIHUACÁN, MÉXICO

Note: For current information about safety/security issues in Teotihuacán, refer to the U.S. State Department website (travel.state.gov).

San Juan Teotihuacán (teh-oh-tee-wah-KAHN) is one of the most widely known and easily accessible of Mexico's major archeological zones. Very little is known about this religious center, the people who built it, or even what the city was originally called. It was designated a World Heritage Site by UNESCO in 1987.

Teotihuacán is thought to have been founded as early as 700 B.C., although it was not until around 100 B.C. that construction of its two great pyramids began. Archeologists estimate that at its height around A.D. 500, up to 200,000 people lived there, making it bigger than Rome at the time and one of the largest cities in the world. The city was burned and abandoned for unknown reasons around A.D. 750; it is believed the decline was gradual and perhaps facilitated by overpopulation and a resulting depletion of natural resources.

The area was later inhabited by the Toltecs; by the time the Aztecs discovered the site, it was in such an advanced state of ruin that they named it Teotihuacán, which means "place of the gods," or more broadly, "where men become gods." The gray stone structures seen today are to a large degree reconstructed, and the barren landscape barely hints at what the city must have looked like during its heyday some 1,500 years ago.

### **Exploring the Site**

Teotihuacán was once paved with volcanic stone and mica slabs, and buildings were plastered with lime and mortar and then decorated with bas-relief sculptures and murals, often painted red; traces of the color are still discernible. The typical structural arrangement was often a courtyard surrounded by several levels of temples and rooms.

The ruins are aligned along a north-south axis traversed by the Avenue of the Dead (Avenida de Los Muertos). The name was given by the Aztecs, who believed that the low structures lining both sides of the avenue were burial sites. All similar in size and style, they accentuate the grandness of the pyramids. Touches of paint can still be detected on some of the building fragments. This wide thoroughfare (paved for today's visitors) is more than a mile long; it seems even longer when you're trekking from one building to another.

The Pyramid of the Sun, on the east side of the Avenue of the Dead, dominates the ruins and is the oldest of Teotihuacán's structures. It is the world's third-largest pyramid; only those at Cholula and Cheops, Egypt, are bigger. The structure rises in five sloping levels to a height of more than 250 feet; each side of its base measures about 735 feet.

Built of adobe brick faced with volcanic stone, the pyramid is visible for some distance from the highway approaching the site. When first discovered it was a gigantic

Please refer to pages 10-11 for Inspected Clean details.

mound covered with vegetation, but even the subsequent reconstruction fails to detract from the achievement of those who originally built this enormous monument without benefit of the wheel or metal tools.

A stairway on the west flank begins at the pyramid's base and leads to the summit, where a temple probably once stood. The 248 steps make for an arduous climb, but the five levels each provide a chance to stop, take a breather and take in the view. In clear weather, the panorama from the top is simply breathtaking. Because of the gentle slope, descending is significantly easier than clambering down the steeper sides of some of Mexico's other pyramids. If you still feel vulnerable, hold onto the link chain that runs the length of the stairway.

The Plaza of the Moon is surrounded by staired platforms and has a square altar in the middle. The Pyramid of the Moon, at the north end of the Avenue of the Dead, is 140 feet high; stairs scale its south face. It appears as tall as the Pyramid of the Sun because it was built on higher ground. The pyramid is connected to a temple with sloping walls. The climb to the summit of this pyramid is shorter (although no less taxing). It's worth the effort, though, for the panoramic vista of the Avenue of the Dead. **Note:** The apex is rocky and uneven; watch your footing.

At the southwest corner of the Plaza of the Moon is the restored Palace of Quetzalpapalotl, Teotihuacán's most elaborate building. Presumed to have been the home of a prominent citizen or supreme priest, it has some well-preserved murals. In the inner courtyard are pillars decorated with bas-reliefs depicting the *quetzal-papalotl*, a feathered butterfly, and various symbols related to water.

Beneath this palace is the Palace of the Jaguars, so called because of the jaguar images in the rooms ringing the courtyard, and the Substructure of the Feathered Snails, part of a beautifully decorated temple beneath the Quetzalpapalotl Palace that features carvings of large snails garlanded with feathers.

In 1998 excavations uncovered a tomb and offerings inside the Pyramid of the Moon that archeologists hope will provide additional clues to help solve the riddle of the site's origination. Objects at what has initially been described as a burial site—most likely someone of high social standing—include obsidian and jade sculptures and skeleton fragments.

At the southern end of the zone is The Citadel (La Ciudadela). Teotihuacán was ruled from this vast sunken square, which encompassed nearly 17 acres and was surrounded by a low wall. The inner esplanade once held thousands of standing people.

Within the courtyard are several temples; the most elaborate is the restored Temple of Quetzalcóatl (the Feathered

Serpent). The god Quetzalcóatl was worshipped by the Mayan, Toltec and Aztec civilizations, although it is unknown whether the inhabitants of Teotihuacán paid tribute to the same being. Carved stone slabs face part of the structure; writhing serpents, their heads sticking out from ruffles of feathers, adorn some of the walls.

Other structures are located off the Avenue of the Dead. Tepantitla, east of the Pyramid of the Moon, may have been the residence of a high priest. Several walls have traces of paintings showing Tláloc, the rain god, amid swimming male figures and water imagery.

Tetitla, west of the loop road that surrounds the archeological zone, has a labyrinthine maze of rooms with patchy murals depicting jaguars, snakes, quetzals and aquatic life. Also west of the loop road is Atetelco, another large-sized group of structures with murals that portray priests. Nearby are Zacuala and Yayahuala, fortresslike one-story structures with many rooms, halls and passageways.

The museum (Museo Teotihuacán) near the Pyramid of the Sun has archeological, historical and diagrammatic exhibits, some of them interactive, that pertain to the peoples who once inhabited the area. Scale models of the zone (which you walk above and view through a glass floor) will help orient the first-time visitor.

#### **General Information and Activities**

The archeological site is about 49 kilometers (30 miles) northeast of downtown Mexico City. Buses for Teotihuacán depart regularly from the Terminal Central de Autobuses del Norte in Mexico City, on Avenida de los 100 Metros; Metro has a subway station at the terminal (Autobuses del Norte, line 5). The trip takes about an hour. Ascertain from the bus driver when the last bus returns to Mexico City and where it picks up passengers. Numerous Mexico City travel agencies offer Teotihuacán sightseeing tours.

To get there by car, take Avenida Insurgentes Norte/Mex. 85-D out of the city and get off at the exit for Mex. 132-D. From the toll plaza, the site entrance is about 22 kilometers (14 miles) east (about a 30-minute drive); signs along the way are marked "Pirámides."

Wear sturdy, nonslip walking shoes if you plan to climb the pyramids, because the rocks can be slippery. On warm, sunny days wear lightweight clothing, sunscreen and a hat. During the summer months (June through September) afternoon showers are frequent. Fall and winter days can be cloudy, chilly and breezy. The altitude is more than 7,000 feet, so walk and climb at a relaxed pace.

**Note:** Numerous souvenir vendors roam the site, and you will be approached on many occasions to purchase items ranging from jewelry to carved figurines to lace

shawls. The vendors are persistent but usually not aggressive. If you have no intention of buying anything, keep walking; a negative shake of the head and a polite "gracias" will convey a "thanks, but no thanks" response. If you stop, chances are you'll never get away. But if you want to buy something, by all means bargain; a vendor will initially offer three to four times what he or she is willing to settle for.

Avoid going on weekends, which can be very crowded. Try to visit during the week and early in the day before the tour buses begin arriving.

Snacks are available at the entrance and there are a few restaurants just outside the site, but most hotels will pack a box lunch to take along on a bus tour. Bring bottled water, particularly if it's a hot day. There are very basic restrooms at the entrance. The site and museum are open daily 8-5. Admission (includes museum) 64 pesos. There is an additional fee of 45 pesos for the use of a video camera. Parking fee 45 pesos.

# TEPOZTLÁN, MORELOS

Note: For current information about safety/security issues in Tepoztlán, refer to the U.S. State Department website (travel.state.gov).

Tepoztlán (teh-pos-LAHN), a name that means "place of copper," is secluded on the lush green slopes of the Sierra del Ajusco mountains and sheltered by the Sierra de Tepoztlán. The latter's scarred cliffs make up Tepozteco National Park, which surrounds the village of Tlalnepantla, northeast of Tepoztlán. This sequestered location was perfect for Emiliano Zapata, regarded locally as a folk hero, who made the village his revolutionary stronghold in 1910.

Despite proximity to urban Cuernavaca and Mexico City, some traditional customs of Tepoztlán's pre-Hispanic predecessors hang on. This is, after all, the reputed birthplace of the Aztec god Quetzalcóatl. Older residents still speak Náhuatl, the ancient Aztec tongue, and mingle Christian and pagan religious practices.

Religious celebrations, in fact, are a way of life here, observed through somber processions to the town cathedral as well as raucous fiestas punctuated by the music of brass bands and the explosive sound of bottle rockets. During Mardi Gras, held on the 5 days preceding Ash Wednesday, people perform Aztec dances and dress as Spanish conquistadores. On Sept. 8 a celebration honors both the Nativity of the Virgin and the god Tepoztécatl, the town's patron saint, a Mexican version of Bacchus credited with the creation of pulgue, a fermented alcoholic drink extracted from the maguey plant.

The panoramic setting—a lush green valley hemmed in by volcanic peaks—lures artists and other creative types, along with devotees of meditation and yoga and followers of New Age philosophies. The altitude and mild year-round weather nurture both tropical and temperate vegetation; everywhere there are exuberant growths of palms, bananas, orchids and bougainvillea, as well as pine and cedar trees and rose bushes. The sandstone cliffs visible from just about any location in town emerge sharply from early morning fog and cast a mellow glow at sunset.

Tepoztlán also is well known for various health treatments, particularly its Aztec sweat lodges, or *temazcales*. These small, round stone structures, which resemble igloos, are scattered around town. An hour's immersion in sauna-like heat includes short breaks when participants rub fresh aloe, eucalyptus and rosemary leaves on their skin. *Temazcal* aficionados swear by this cleansing ritual.

The Saturday and Sunday market, which sets up in and around the main square, is one of the best in the region. It overflows with locally made clothing and handicrafts pottery, hand-carved wood figures, woolen sweaters, carvings etched on tree bark, incense, '60s-style hippie jewelry—as well as mounds of produce and an amazing variety of food stands. Natural healers and shamans (Tepoztlán and the surrounding towns have a reputation for their brujos, or witches) also congregate at the market, selling herbs and potions. It can get very crowded, as many Mexico City families head here on weekends.

The mystical vibe even extends to ice cream. Tepoznieves, on Avenida 5 de Mayo near the main square, offers myriad flavors of ice cream and sorbet, including such unusual choices as tequila and chili. Many are made from exotic native fruits like the green, grapefruit-sized guanabana. No artificial colorings or preservatives are used, lending the different varieties a rainbow of pale, pastel hues. Ice cream made here is packed in freezers and shipped to Tepoznieves outlets all over Mexico. It's worth dropping in just to see this ice cream parlor's wildly colorful tables and counters, tile floors and yellow walls covered with fanciful artwork.

#### **Practicalities**

Tepoztlán is about 80 kilometers (50 miles) south of downtown Mexico City via toll highway Mex. 95-D to the exit for Mex. 115-D. The turn-off to Tepoztlán is clearly marked. First-class Pullman de Morelos buses depart daily for Cuernavaca/Tepoztlán from Mexico City's Taxqueña bus station, in the southern part of the city; the fare to Tepoztlán is around 85 pesos. Buses to Cuernavaca also leave from Mexico City's airport. For Pullman de Morelos information and reservations, phone 01 (800)

624-0360 (toll-free long distance within Mexico). Bus reservations also can be made through Ticket Bus; phone 01 (800) 009-9090 (toll-free long distance within Mexico).

From Cuernavaca, taxi fare for the 40-minute drive to Tepoztlán averages \$15-\$20 U.S. (including the toll). The Tepoztlán bus terminal is on Avenida Tepozteco near the entrance into town; a free shuttle runs regularly from the terminal to the main plaza daily until 5 p.m.

**EX-CONVENT OF TEPOZTLÁN** (Museo de la Natividad) is just e. of the main plaza, off Av. Revolución 1910 next to the church. Built by Dominican friars, it was completed in 1588. Some walls of this massive structure are more than 6 feet thick. It has a crumbling beauty—much of the plaster has peeled away over time—and walls covered with beautiful murals. Upstairs is the small Historical Museum of Tepoztlán, with five rooms of interesting exhibits that depict the region's religious, ethnological and natural history. Information is in Spanish.

The church adjoining the monastery has twin spires, a barrel-vaulted interior and a walled atrium filled with aromatic eucalyptus trees. Religious paintings done by local artists also are on display. The mural at the entry gate is a portrait of the convent's history created entirely from dried beans, corn kernels and other grains. **Phone:** (739) 395-0255.

**TEPOZTECO PYRAMID** (Pirámide de Tepozteco) stands at the top of a hill n. of town; the walking trail begins at the n. end of Av. 5 de Mayo/Del Tepozteco. Built around 1200 by the Tlahuica Indians, it honored the god Tepoztécatl.

The pyramid is about a 1.3-mile hike from the parking lot. Approximately 35 feet tall, it rises from a stone platform and can be climbed (the 13 steps are very tall). At the top are the remains of a two-room temple, still showing evidence of carved door jambs and pedestals. Your reward for all of this exertion is the view of the valley below, which is simply magnificent. Peanuts are for sale to feed the coatimundis (tejones); these long-snouted, tree-dwelling relatives of the raccoon, native to Mexico and Central America, beg for food from visitors.

**Note:** The walking trail is very steep and very rocky the entire way; wear sturdy shoes and bring a large bottle of water. The trek takes a little over an hour and is recommended only for people who are in reasonable physical shape. The trail ends at a steep staircase that leads up to the pyramid. But trees provide shade along the way and the countryside is beautiful, so plan on several stops to both conserve energy and admire the views.

Phone: (777) 312-3108.

#### TLALPAN, CITY OF MEXICO

Tlalpan (TLAHL-pan), south of University City, can be reached by bus from the Taxqueña Metro station (line 2). The name means "place of solid ground"; in this area south of the Valley of Mexico, regional civilizations flourished as early as 1200 B.C. The Olympic Village (Villa Olímpica), built to house athletes during the 1968 summer games, is now a residential area.

Near Plaza de la Constitución, Tlalpan's main square, is the 1532 church of San Agustín de las Cuevas, which contains paintings by Miguel Cabrera. To the southwest is the extinct 13,097-foot Volcán Ajusco. Buses that leave from Azteca Stadium on Calzada de Tlalpan travel to the volcano, which offers excellent views of the surrounding area if the weather is clear.

# **TOLUCA, MÉXICO**

**Note:** For current information about safety/security issues in Toluca, refer to the U.S. State Department website (travel.state.gov).

Capital of the state of México, Toluca (toh-LOO-cah)—about 65 kilometers (40 miles) west of Mexico City—is a commercial center in the middle of the flat Toluca Valley. One of the highest Mexican cities in elevation, it thus enjoys cool weather despite the tropical latitude. Although it is heavily industrial, low buildings characterize Toluca's skyline, and there are many little plazas and manicured parks.

Toluca was an Indian settlement as early as 1200; the name is derived from the Náhuatl Indian expression tollocan, or "those who bow their heads." Spaniards under Hernando Cortés began settling the region in the early 16th century after the conqueror was granted 22 towns in central and southern Mexico by King Carlos V.

Plaza of the Martyrs (Plaza de Los Mártires), the main plaza, is between avenidas Sebastian Lerdo de Tejada and de la Independencia. It was named for a group of revolutionaries who were executed in 1811 for their part in Mexico's struggle to win freedom from Spain, an uprising started by Father Miguel Hidalgo. On the plaza's south side is the cathedral, where traditional dances are presented on various Mexican holidays. Check with the State Tourism Office for more information about these colorful spectacles.

The Museum of Fine Arts (Museo de Bellas Artes) is on Avenida Santos Degollado a block north of the plaza. The collection of paintings and sculptures spans the 16th through the 19th centuries.

A block or so south of the plaza along Avenida Miguel Hidalgo is Los Portales, a pedestrian-only walkway fronting an arcade of shops and restaurants protected by arches and buzzing with sidewalk vendors. It's an interesting place to stroll. Here rows of candy stands offer Toluca's local fruit confections, and liquor stores sell an orange-flavored liqueur called moscos.

From Mexico City, the easiest way to reach Toluca by car is to take toll highway Mex. 15-D. This direct route takes about an hour. The toll fee for automobiles is around 75 pesos. Buses to Toluca depart regularly from Mexico City's Terminal de Autobuses del Poniente, the western bus terminal: to get there, take Metro to the Observatorio station (at the western end of Line 1). Buses marked "Toluca-Directo" make the trip in the least amount of time.

Nevado de Toluca Park is about 25 kilometers (16 miles) southwest of Toluca on Mex. 134 to the junction with Mex. 10, then south on Mex. 10 about 8 kilometers (5 miles) to the park entrance. The 15,032-foot-tall, extinct volcano for which the park is named is Mexico's fourth highest mountain peak.

Nevado de Toluca was designated a national park in 1936 but lost this status in 2014 due to a combination of deforestation, chemical contamination and mining and farming activities that have decimated large areas. But there are still alpine meadows and forests of pine and fir, and with care and a good guide it's possible to drive to the top of the mountain on a rough, unsurfaced road and then hike down into the crater.

Mexico City-based outfitter Ecotura offers full-day Nevado de Toluca tours that include transportation from your hotel, lunch and a visit to the crater. Participants must be in good physical shape. The tour is offered once per month; phone (55) 5555-9382 (English may not be spoken) to confirm the schedule and make the required reservations. The cost is \$245 (U.S.) per person.

Several towns and villages east and south of the city offer a firsthand look at the way Mexico's rural population has engaged in manufacturing and marketing since pre-Hispanic days. Visiting these places during the morning is a good way to acquire locally made items at the various tianguis (open-air markets), even without benefit of bargaining expertise. East of Toluca on Mex. 15 to the paved turn-off for the village of San Pedro Cholula, then south, is appropriately named Tianguistenco. The Tuesday market fills roughly half the streets in town with baskets, sarapes and other crafts from throughout the Toluca Valley.

México State Tourism Office (Secretaría de Turismo del Estado de México): Calle Primero de Mayo #731 at the corner of Calle Robert Bosch, second floor, Industrial Zone. Phone: (722) 275-8108 or (722) 275-8109.



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# **Central Mexico**

he "heartland of Mexico" has more reminders of Spain's legacy than any other part of the country. It is in this region that Spanish explorers capitalized upon abundant mineral resources, particularly silver, and built Mexico's first colonial cities. Many of Mexico's grand cathedrals and historic buildings date from some 300 years of Spanish rule.

The push for independence began with secret meetings in Morelia, Querétaro and San Miguel de Allende, where revolutionaries plotted Spain's downfall to coincide with the rising of Nueva España ("New Spain"), an independent nation. It

was in the town of Dolores Hidalgo that Father Miguel Hidalgo first declared Mexico's freedom from Spain in his 1810 proclamation *Grito de Dolores*.

The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo was signed in the city of Querétaro in 1848. It ended the Mexican War and forced Mexico to give up its territory north of the Rio Grande to the United States. In May 1862, invading French forces under emperor Napoleon III were soundly defeated at Puebla, a triumphant event celebrated in today's *Cinco de Mayo* festivities both north and south of the border.

The colonial cities of Guanajuato, Morelia, Puebla, Querétaro, San Miguel de Allende and Zacatecas feature



well-preserved historic centers, pretty plazas, and beautiful cathedrals and churches. Puebla is known for buildings covered with Talavera tiles arranged in geometric patterns, a Spanish import. Guadalajara is the home of the jarabe, or Mexican hat dance, mariachi music and the flashy horsemanship of the *charreada* (Mexican rodeo).

AAA recommends that travelers consult U.S. State Department travel advisories when planning traveling abroad. Find this information at travel.state.gov/content/ passports/en/country/mexico.html.

#### AGUASCALIENTES, AGUASCALIENTES

Aguascalientes (ah-guahs-ka-lee-EHN-tehs) was founded in 1575 as a way station for Spaniards traveling the "Silver Route" between Zacatecas and Mexico City. This manufacturing center still has impressive reminders of its colonial past; many are in the vicinity of Plaza de la Patria, the main plaza, which is best explored on foot.

The Government Palace (Palacio de Gobierno), on the plaza's south side, is built of red sandstone; it features hand-carved pillars and a fine interior patio. A highlight is the mural by Chilean painter Oswaldo Barra, which depicts all manner of mercantile scenes as well as miners grimly ascending from underground. The building is open Mon.-Sat. 8 a.m.-8:30 p.m.; closed holidays.

Next door is City Hall (Palacio Municipal), which has an attractive fountain inside the entrance. The baroque Cathedral, on the plaza's west side, is the oldest church in Aguascalientes and contains noteworthy religious paintings. The plaza itself, with another fountain and a park-like setting furnished with benches, is a pleasant spot to relax.

The House of Culture (Casa de la Cultura), 2 blocks west of the plaza on Calle V. Carranza, is housed in an old colonial convent and is worth a stop for the beauty of the building, which has courtyards festooned with vividly colored bougainvillea. The Church of San Antonio, about 6 blocks northeast of the plaza, has a cupola adorned with stained-glass windows.

The annual San Marcos Fair (Feria Nacional de San Marcos), honoring the city's patron saint, has been held since the early 19th century. Mexico's largest state fair takes place from mid-April to early May at Plaza de San Marcos, about 5 blocks west of Plaza de la Patria via Avenida Venustiano Carranza (near the bullring). In addition to fireworks, live music concerts and amusement rides, events include a business expo, sports and culinary competitions, fashion shows, kids' activities, the crowning of a festival queen and a huge parade on Apr. 25, the saint's day. Although gambling is technically illegal in Mexico, the fair also operates a casino open to ages 18 and over. If you plan to visit the city when the fair takes place, book accommodations well in advance.

#### **Practicalities**

Jesús Terán International Airport is about 34 kilometers (21 miles) south of the city via Mex. 45 (the Aguascalientes-León Highway). American Airlines, United and Volaris offer direct flights from the United States. Other airlines providing service to Aguascalientes include Aeroméxico and Delta. For additional information about airlines see Arriving by Air, page p. 28. One-way taxi fare between the airport and downtown will cost about \$20 (U.S.).

It's easy to get lost in and around Aguascalientes if you're depending on highway signs and especially if you're a firsttime visitor; obtain specific directions before attempting to negotiate the city on your own. Roadways within the state are narrow, with little or no shoulders and much truck traffic, but are well maintained. Toll highway Mex. 45-D runs southeast from Aguascalientes to Lagos de Moreno.

# Day Trips

Ojocaliente Sports Center (Centro Deportivo Ojocaliente) is about a kilometer east of downtown on Mex. 70. This spa has thermal pools, steam baths, saunas and tennis courts. Plaza Vestir, about 10 kilometers (6 miles) south on Mex. 45, is a collection of shops selling locally made clothing, embroidered items and shoes. The Hacienda de Peñuelas breeding ranch, about 17 kilometers (11 miles) south on Mex. 45, is said to produce some of Mexico's most spirited bulls. Check with your hotel or a local travel agency regarding arrangements to visit the ranch.

In the nearby town of Pabellón de Hidalgo, 33 kilometers (20 miles) north of Aguascalientes on Mex. 45, then 5 kilometers (3 miles) west, is the Hacienda San Blas de Pabellón, which houses the Museum of the Insurgency. Here, after losing two important battles against the Spanish in 1811, insurgent leader Father Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla was relieved of his command and replaced by Ignacio Allende. The hacienda produces woolen goods on hand-powered looms.

Asientos, easily reached by bus, is about 45 kilometers (28 miles) northeast. A colonial atmosphere prevails in this mining town, and you can view 16th- and 17thcentury paintings on display in the local churches. Encarnación de Díaz, about 42 kilometers (26 miles) south on Mex. 45, has old baroque churches and a central plaza with topiary trees sculpted into various shapes, including Christopher Columbus' ships the Niña, the Pinta and the Santa María.

Aguascalientes City Tourism Office: In the Government Palace building (Palacio de Gobierno), within the historic city center on the south side of Plaza de la Patria. Open Tues.-Sun. 9-8. **Phone:** (449) 915-9504.



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Hotel. **Address:** Av Jose Maria Escriva de Balaguer 1073. **Facility:** 144 units. 9 stories, interior corridors. **Amenities:** safes. **Pool:** heated outdoor. **Activities:** exercise room. **Guest Services:** valet laundry.



#### AJIJIC, JALISCO

Note: For current information about safety/security issues in Ajijic, refer to the U.S. State Department website (travel.state.gov).

Ajijic (ah-hee-HEEK) is about 8 kilometers (5 miles) west of Chapala on the northern shore of Lake Chapala. This artists' and writers' colony, one of several resort/retirement communities along the lake, is populated by many former U.S. residents.

Along Calle Morelos between the main square and the waterfront are shops and boutiques selling everything from local handicrafts to designer fashions. Easily reached from Guadalajara, Ajijic has a picturesque waterfront area and cobblestone streets and is a pleasant destination for shopping, strolling and perhaps lunch. The town's Fiesta of St. Andrew, held in late November, is celebrated with parades, dancing and fireworks.

#### **DOLORES HIDALGO, GUANAJUATO**

Known in Mexico as Cuna de la Independencia Nacional (The Cradle of National Independence) and designated a national historic monument, Dolores Hidalgo (doh-LOHrehs ee-DAHL-goh) is located in the valley of the Río Laja. Just before midnight on Sept. 15, 1810, Father Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla called together his parishioners by ringing the village church bell. He then gave the venerated Grito de Dolores, a speech announcing Mexican independence that ignited the 11-year war to achieve it.

A statue of Hidalgo stands in Plaza Principal, the main plaza, where vendors sell their wares among comfortable old benches and square-trimmed trees. The area is known for its signature Talavera-style ceramics, leather products and other handicrafts. The former homes of other Mexican heroes are here as well: guides are available for town tours.

The annual Independence Day celebrations held throughout the country on Sept. 15-16 re-create Father Hidalgo's historic rallying cry, and the president of Mexico often officiates at the Mexico City ceremony. In mid-September Dolores Hidalgo holds the week-long Independence Fair.

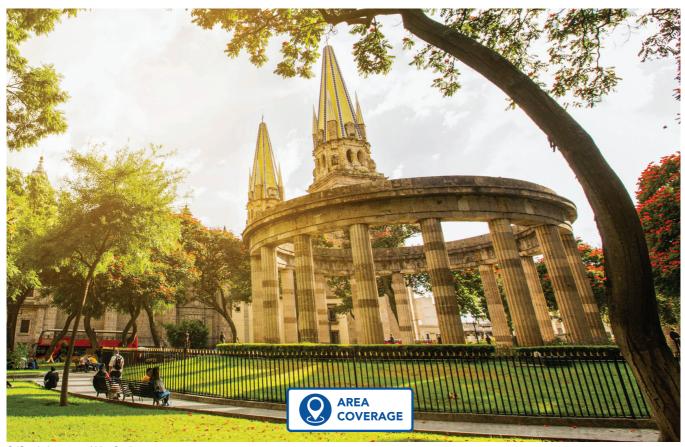
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# Guadalajara

City Population: 1,385,629 Elevation: 1,552 meters (5,091 feet)

# **Editor's Picks:**

Cabañas Cultural Institute	(see p.	373)
Degollado Theater	(see p.	373)
Plaza Tapatía	(see p.	374)

# **GOOD FACTS TO KNOW**

#### WHOM TO CALL

**Police (emergency):** Dial 911 (emergency services) and ask to be connected to an English-speaking operator if you need immediate assistance.

Police (non-emergency): (33) 3668-0800.

Hospitals: Hospital México-Americano, Calle Colomos #2110, (33) 3648-3333 or 01 (800) 462-2238 (toll-free long distance within Mexico), and the Red Cross (Cruz Roja), (33) 3614-1269, 911 (ambulance assistance) or 01 (800) 667-4767 (toll-free long distance within Mexico), both provide 24-hour emergency service. Major hotels and the U.S. Consulate should have information regarding doctors who are on 24-hour call.

#### WHERE TO LOOK

#### **Newspapers**

English-language newspapers, including the weekly *Guadalajara Reporter*, are available at newsstands and the Hotel Fenix, downtown at avenidas Corona and López Cotilla. The monthly *Lake Chapala Reporter* has information about the communities around Lake Chapala.

#### **Publications**

Sandi Bookstore, Av. Tepeyac #718 in the Chapalita neighborhood west of downtown, has English-language newspapers and



Please refer to pages 10-11 for Inspected Clean details.

books. The Sanborns restaurant chain has several area locations and also offers books, newspapers and magazines in English; the downtown branch is at avenidas Juárez and 16 de Septiembre, a block south of Plaza de Armas.

#### **Visitor Information**

Jalisco State Tourism Office (Secretaría de Turismo): Calle Morelos #102 on Plaza Tapatía (near the Degollado Theater). Phone: (33) 3668-1600.

A tourist information booth is inside the southern doorway of the Government Palace (Palacio de Gobierno), facing Plaza de Armas; it is open Mon.-Fri. 9-3 and 6-8 p.m., Sat. 9-1.

U.S. Consulate: Calle Progreso #175 at Avenida López Cotilla. Phone: (33) 3268-2100.

#### WHAT TO KNOW

#### **Currency Exchange**

A number of casas de cambio (currency exchange houses) are located downtown along Avenida López Cotilla between calles Corona and Degollado, about 3 blocks south of the cathedral. Most of them post their rates, and they normally don't have the lines that banks often have. Dollars can be exchanged at branches of Banamex banks Mon.-Sat. 9-1. A centrally located downtown Banamex branch is on Paseo Degollado, 3 blocks east of the Degollado Theater. ATMs are the guickest and most convenient way to get cash; withdrawals are in pesos.

#### Staying Safe

The rules in Guadalajara are the same as those in any big city. At night, avoid urban neighborhoods that are away from the downtown core or other tourist areas; dark side streets in particular can be dangerous. If going out for the evening or taking a side trip during the day, it's a good idea to hire a taxi driver affiliated with your hotel. Keep an eye on personal items at all times, especially in the crowded shopping districts, and avoid wearing jewelry or carrying large sums of money. Women are not welcome in cantina bars and other bastions of heavy drinking and machismo attitudes.

Note: For current information about safety/security issues in Guadalajara, refer to the U.S. State Department website (travel.state.gov).

Guadalajara's (gwah-dah-lah-HAH-rah) history dates to 1530, just 38 years after Christopher Columbus first reached North America and 9 years after the conquest of Mexico by Hernando Cortés. Another Spanish explorer, Nuño de Guzmán, founded the settlement that today is Mexico's second largest city.

Guzmán was a cruel conqueror; he and his soldiers slaughtered entire Indian communities in the course of exploring the lands west and north of Mexico City. The settlement was relocated several times in the aftermath of Indian attacks and finally ended up in the Valley of Atemajac in 1542. The move was a wise choice, as the valley offered room for unimpeded expansion.

Spanish expeditions left from Guadalajara to gain control of such far-flung lands as the Philippine and Molucca Islands and the island of Guam, and to establish missions in northern Mexico and present-day California. Wealth from the region's farms and silver mines was channeled into the construction of lavish churches, mansions and monuments.

In the late 1850s and early 1860s the city withstood army attacks led alternately by Archduke Maximilian and Benito Juárez; the latter made the city the capital of his reform government for a few months during his forced exile from Mexico City. Today it's a sprawling metropolis, surrounded by high plains noted for horse, cattle and grain ranches.

Guadalajara, a mile above sea level, enjoys abundant sunshine most of the year. High temperatures are normally in the 70s and 80s; uncomfortably humid days are rare. In April and May, the warmest months, it can creep into the low 90s, but always cools off in the evening. The rainy season is June through September. Air pollution is a problem, although not as severe as in Mexico City. In the evenings bring a sweater or light jacket if you're concerned about what to do if you get chilly.

Guadalajara even has its own word: tapatío. Reputedly derived from tlapatiotl, a term used to denote cacao or other small objects frequently used as units of exchange in Indian marketplaces, it now refers to any person, thing or quality that is indisputably Guadalajaran, like the jarabe, or Mexican hat dance, and mariachi music.

# **Getting There**

# By Air

Miguel Hidalgo International Airport is about 17 kilometers (11 miles) southeast of the city off Mex. 23. Aeroméxico, Alaska Airlines, Delta, United and Volaris offer direct flights from U.S. cities. International connections are usually via Mexico City. Numerous half-hour flights connect Guadalajara with Puerto Vallarta. Routes and direct-flight availability vary depending on the time of year, so check with the airline or a travel agency before trying to book cheap airline flights. For additional information about airlines see Arriving by Air, page p. 28.

Airport Transportation (Autotransportaciónes Aeropuerto, ATASA) offers shared-ride shuttle van service to and from any place in the metropolitan area. Tickets are sold at a booth outside the terminal exit; fares are based on a zone system and average about \$16 per person (U.S.). For details phone (33) 3688-5289. Taxis also take



passengers to and from the airport; the fare to the downtown area is about \$30 (U.S.).

### By Car

Guadalajara's location between the Pacific coast and central Mexico makes it an ideal base from which to explore Jalisco and the surrounding states of Nayarit, Zacatecas, Aguascalientes, Guanajuato, Michoacán and Colima. Mex. 15/15-D is the major highway from the northwest: Mex. 54 from the north and northeast. Mex. 80 proceeds southwest to coastal Mex. 200, which heads south to Manzanillo or north to Puerto Vallarta. With the exception of Mex. 15-D, all of the above routes are old (free) highways.

The Guadalajara-Manzanillo toll highway, Mex. 54-D, begins at El Cuarenta, on Mex. 15 south of the city. Although the distance to Colima is not much shorter than that traveled on free Mex. 54, the toll road avoids the latter's narrow, winding stretches.

Toll highway Mex. 15-D provides a direct link between Guadalajara and Mexico City. It takes between 5 and 6 hours to drive the 540-kilometer (335-mile) route. Expect to pay around \$50 (U.S.) in toll charges.

South of and roughly parallel to Mex. 15-D is old Mex. 15, a winding road that hugs the southern shore of Lake Chapala and passes through the cities of Morelia, Zitácuaro and Toluca on its way to Mexico City—a scenic but much more time-consuming alternative. The road is in poor condition in places, and driving the stretch from Morelia to Mexico City is not recommended because of safety and security concerns.

# By Bus

The big, modern New Bus Station (Nueva Central Camionera) is about 10 kilometers (6 miles) southeast of downtown outside the suburb of Tlaquepaque (on the way to Tonalá). Bus lines service practically every destination in the country; several of the bigger companies are connected with Greyhound Lines Inc. Cross-country buses make frequent trips between Guadalajara and border points. First-class travel compares favorably with major U.S. lines; these buses are the standard size but carry fewer passengers.

Seven terminal buildings (módules) in the U-shaped station accommodate different bus companies; some have a presence at several terminals, so you need to find the terminal associated with your specific destination. Amenities include shuttle bus service, luggage storage (guarda equipaje), places to eat, restrooms, Ladatel long-distance phones and tourist and hotel information (although the booths are not always staffed). City buses and colectivos designated "Centro" or "Central" travel between the bus station and downtown. You also can take a taxi from this station to the downtown area. Taxi tickets are sold inside each terminal building; fares are based on a zone system.

For shorter bus trips to Tequila, the Lake Chapala suburban communities or other towns within a 60-mile radius of the city, use the Old Bus Station (Antigua Central Camionera), located off Avenida Dr. R. Michel at calles Los Angeles and 28 de Enero (in the city center and just northeast of Parque Agua Azul). Also shaped like a U, it consists of two wings (salas) and has luggage storage, restrooms and food stands. There are taxi stands on either side of the terminal. Inexpensive shuttle service is provided to the New Bus Station.

Route, schedule and fare information can be obtained at two offices located on Calzada de la Independencia where it runs beneath Plaza Tapatía. Hours are daily 9-2 and 4-7. For additional information about buses see Bus Service, page p. 36.

# **Getting Around**

### City Layout

The city is divided into four sectors; street names change when a new sector is entered. The major north-south routes are Calzada Independencia/Calzada Gobernador Curiel, which divides Guadalajara into east and west sectors; Avenida Alcalde/Avenida 16 de Septiembre, which passes through the Historic Center (Centro Histórico); Avenida Federalismo/Avenida Colón, which runs a few blocks west of Alcalde; and Avenida López Mateos, the main thoroughfare passing through a concentration of malls, upscale shops and local restaurants west of downtown.

The major east-west routes are Avenida Circunvalación, which runs north of downtown; Avenida Avila Camacho, which provides access to the northwestern suburb of Zapopan; Avenida Independencia/Avenida Industria (not to be confused with Calzada Independencia), which runs through the historic center a block north of the cathedral; Avenida Vallarta/Avenida Juárez/Avenida Javier Mina, which also runs through the historic center and divides the city into north and south sectors; and Avenida Guadalupe/Avenida Niños Héroes/Calzada González Gallo, which links points of interest in the southern part of the city.

The carefully preserved downtown historic district is the chief tourist destination. Forming a shape somewhat like a giant cross are four plazas, each offering a distinct personality: Plaza Tapatía, Plaza de la Liberación, Plaza de Armas and Plaza Guadalajara. They all surround the cathedral, the heart of the old city. Here, amid narrow cobblestone lanes and weathered two- and three-story buildings.

street vendors and shoeshine boys are an integral part of the urban landscape.

Plaza Tapatía is conveniently located close to museums, monuments and grand examples of colonial architecture. It features tree-shaded parks, stone walkways and burbling fountains as well as numerous local restaurants. On Sundays, dressed-up families stroll up and down Plaza de la Liberación, just east of the cathedral at Tapatia's western end. A narrow waterway runs along this plaza, which is bordered on both sides by shops and more places to eat. A statue of Father Miguel Hidalgo shows the priest holding a broken chain, a symbol of his call to end slavery in Mexico.

Plaza de Armas, a block south of the cathedral, is the city's traditional main square, bordered on the east side by the Government Palace. Plaza Guadalajara (just west of the cathedral) was formerly called Plaza de los Laureles for the Indian laurel trees that shade it. The church on the plaza's north side, built in the mid-20th century, is one of the newer buildings in the historic center.

West and south of the historic center the boulevards are wider and the buildings taller. Along north-south Avenida Chapultepec between Avenida Niños Héroes and Avenida México—about 20 blocks west of the cathedral—are office buildings interspersed with stores and places to eat. Farther west, along Avenida López Mateos between Avenida Vallarta and Avenida Mariano Otero, are major hotels, nightlife venues and the big Plaza del Sol mall.

Two thoroughfares loop around Guadalajara. The inner Avenida de la Patria travels around the western half of the



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city between Avenida de las Américas and Avenida López Mateos. The outer Anillo Periférico encircles the entire metropolitan area; navigating this two-lane route can be slow going, however, due to potholes and heavy truck traffic. Glorietas (traffic circles) mark busy city intersections.

**Note:** Due to air pollution levels, all vehicles with Jalisco license plates must pass a tune-up test. Vehicles with outof-state plates, however, are exempted.

#### **Rental Cars**

Hertz is one of many rental car agencies with offices at the airport and downtown. Be sure you fully understand the terms of any rental contract, especially with regard to insurance coverage. It's significantly less expensive to reserve before you leave home; make reservations at least 1 week in advance.

Note: AAA members enjoy discounts through Hertz for vehicles booked in the United States. Consult your local AAA club or phone Hertz, (800) 654-3080.

#### **Buses**

Buses are the most economical means of local transportation, and they cover every part of town. City buses run daily every 5 to 10 minutes from 6 a.m.-11 p.m. School bus-style vehicles have the cheapest fares (about 50c U.S.), but also are quite likely to be very crowded.

*Tur* buses (operated by Linea Turquesa), turquoise in color and with the letters "TUR" designated on the side, cost more (about 90c U.S.) but are air conditioned, do not carry standing passengers and travel to such outlying tourist destinations as Tlaquepaque, Tonalá and Zapopan. Par Vial buses travel a central east-west route along avenidas Independencia/Hidalgo as far west as Minerva Circle (at Avenida López Mateos); from there, they double back along Avenida Vallarta/Juárez, a few blocks south.

Privately operated *colectivos* (minivans) cost about the same as city buses; some have their destination marked on the windshield, although routes and pick-up points change frequently.

#### **Taxis**

Compared to the bus, a taxi ride in Guadalajara is expensive. Even short 10-minute rides are likely to cost at least \$8 (U.S.). Rates go up at night. All cabs are equipped with a meter, but drivers can be reluctant to use them, quoting a flat fee instead; make certain you agree on a destination and a fare with the driver before entering the cab. Check at your hotel's front desk for current fares; bellboys can often assist those who don't speak Spanish.

Most cabs are found at or called from a cab stand (sitio). Sitios are located near all the major hotels and attractions. The safest option is to stick with cab drivers who are affiliated with your hotel.

#### **Parking**

On-street parking in the city center is scarce. Public parking garages generally charge a fixed rate per hour; few are insured for customers. Parking lots charge less than garages. An underground lot is below Plaza de la Liberación, just east of the cathedral. Always avoid areas marked "No E," "Estacionamiento Prohibido" (No parking) or "Exclusivo" (Reserved). License plates are removed from illegally parked vehicles, and a fine must be paid to retrieve them.

#### **Public Transportation**

Guadalajara's tren ligero (light rail) rapid-transit system has two lines. Line 1 runs north-south along Avenida Federalismo-Colón for a distance of about 10 miles, between the northern and southern stretches of the Periférico. More helpful to visitors is Line 2, which runs eastwest along avenidas Vallarta/Juárez and Javier Mina (the street name changes at Calzada Independencia). Trains run about every 15 minutes or so daily 6 a.m.-11 p.m. The fare is 7 pesos; 1-peso coins are needed to purchase tickets. Stops are marked by a "T" symbol.

#### **Guides/Tours**

Tour guides with name tags who congregate at the airport and bus terminal are likely to be agents on commission with hotels. The major hotels usually have a list of licensed bilingual guides. Bus tours of the downtown area as well as nearby Tlaquepaque and Zapopan are offered by Tapatío Tours. The company's red double-decker buses depart from Plaza Tapatía; phone (33) 3613-0887 for schedule and fare information. For visitors without a car, this is an easy way to experience the city and one of the city's fun things to do.

Rides in horse-drawn calandrias (carriages) can be taken throughout the central downtown area for about \$20 (U.S.) for up to four people and are a relaxing way to see the sights as well as a great option for travelers looking for fun things for couples to do. Excursions depart from the Regional Museum of Guadalajara, Liberty Market and San Francisco Park. Few drivers speak English, so you may want to familiarize yourself with the layout of the city before embarking.

# What To See

AGUA AZUL PARK (Parque Agua Azul) is at the southern end of downtown, adjacent to the intersection of calzadas Independencia Sur and González Gallo. This is the oldest of the city's parks. Trees, flowers, fountains and a manmade lake make it a popular spot for city residents and a pleasant place to while away an afternoon. On the grounds are an orchid house, an aviary and an outdoor amphitheater where band concerts take place. On the other side of Calzada González Gallo is Plaza Juárez, which has a monument encircled by the flags of other Latin American countries. Phone: (33) 3619-0328.

Jalisco House of Handicrafts (Casa de las Artesanías de Jalisco) is at the northern end of Agua Azul Park, with a separate entrance on Calzada González Gallo. This state-run store sells fixed-price regional handicrafts, including leather saddles, furniture, blown glass, ceramics, pottery, textiles, tinwork and woodcarvings. **Phone:** (33) 3030-9090.

ARCHEOLOGICAL MUSEUM OF WESTERN MEXICO (Museo de Arqueología del Occidente de Mexico) is at Av. 16 de Septiembre #889, just n. of Plaza Juárez and across from Agua Azul Park. It exhibits a small but select group of figurines, pottery and other artifacts from sites in Colima, Jalisco and Navarit. Phone: (33) 3619-7043.

CABAÑAS CULTURAL INSTITUTE (Instituto Cultural Cabañas) is at the e. end of Plaza Tapatía at Cabañas #8; take a taxi, as this is a congested area. It was built in the early 19th century and financed by Bishop Juan Cruz Ruíz de Cabañas. Originally offering shelter for crippled, destitute and orphaned men, women and children, Hospicio Cabañas provided education and medical care for children through the 1970s before being renovated for use as a cultural center.

This architecturally fascinating complex encompasses 23 patios linked by pink-tiled corridors. It is the showplace for some of José Clemente Orozco's most powerful murals, particularly "El Hombre de Fuego" ("Man of Fire"), which graces the lofty ceiling. The art is memorable, although it depicts scenes of horrific violence from Mexico's history.

In addition to contemporary art and changing exhibitions, the institute has a movie theater, performing arts theater and an outdoor patio where ballet, music and dance performances take place. Phone: (33) 3617-6734 or (33) 3668-1645.

CATHEDRAL OF THE ASSUMPTION OF OUR LADY faces Av. Fray Antonio Alcalde. Begun in 1561, it was consecrated in 1618. Its twin 200-foot towers were erected in 1848 after an earthquake destroyed the original, much shorter structures. Emblazoned with yellow and blue tiles, they are a city landmark. Inside are three cavernous naves and 11 elegantly appointed altars, a gift from King Ferdinand VII of Spain. A lovely sculpture, "Our Lady of the Roses," was given to the city by the 16th-century

Spanish king Carlos V. The priceless painting "The Assumption of the Virgin" in the sacristy is thought to be by Bartolomé Murillo.

JOSÉ CLEMENTE OROZCO MUSEUM (Casa Taller José Clemente Orozco) is at Av. Aurelio Aceves #27, just e. of Minerva Circle off Av. Vallarta. This is the former workshop and residence of José Clemente Orozco, Jalisco's leading muralist (1883-1949). Distinguished by a three-story window, it displays photographs, tools, clothing and his personal easel. The wall facing the window is covered by a huge mural entitled "Alegoría del Vino" ("Wine Allegory"). Also on display are documents, handwritten letters, posters, diplomas and other tributes to the artist.

Phone: (33) 3616-8329.

**DEGOLLADO THEATER** (Teatro Degollado) is on Calle Belén between Calle Morelos and Av. Hidalgo, just e. of the cathedral. This impressive neoclassic structure, completed in 1866, has been compared to Milan's La Scala Opera House, although it has the grimy look of stone buildings exposed to decades of vehicle exhaust. The relief above the columned entrance depicts Apollo and the Nine Muses. The plague on the outside back wall commemorates Guadalajara's 1542 founding ceremony.

Inside are opulent red and gold balconies and a dome with murals painted by Gerardo Suárez that depict Dante's "Divine Comedy." The remodeled theater is the home of the Jalisco Philharmonic Orchestra and presents concerts, live theater performances and film festivals year-round. Performances are given by the University of Guadalajara Folkloric Ballet usually every Sunday at 10 a.m. If you can't attend an event, the theater's interior can usually be viewed (rehearsal schedule permitting) Tues.-Sun. from around 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. **Phone:** (33) 3614-7300 for performance and ticket information.

**EXPLATORY TEMPLE** (Templo Expiatorio) is w. of the historic center, bounded by Av. López Cotilla, Calle Madero, Av. Enrique Díaz de León and Av. Escorza. This massive structure covers a city block. One balcony of the Gothic-style church, built at the turn of the 20th century, features mechanical representations of the 12 Apostles who make an appearance, accompanied by a carillonplaying classical music, three times daily (9 a.m., noon and 6 p.m.). The clockwork figures can be viewed from the square in front of the church.

GOVERNMENT PALACE (Palacio de Gobierno) faces the e. side of Plaza de Armas. This Spanish baroque building dates from 1643 and was completed in 1774. Note the stone gargoyles, used to divert water from the roof, and the pillared front entrance. An enormous mural by José Clemente Orozco depicts Father Miguel Hidalgo,

bearing a flaming torch, symbolically leading Mexico's struggle against such 20th-century forces of oppression as communism and fascism.

Two important historical events took place here: Hidalgo's decree abolishing slavery in 1810 and Guillermo Prieto's plea saving president Benito Juárez from assassination in 1858. The cannon and armor carved on the building's facade are a symbol of colonial authority. Phone: (33) 3668-1825.

OBLATOS CANYON (Barranca de Oblatos) is 10 km (6 mi.) n.e. of downtown Guadalajara via Calzada Independencia Norte, near the Guadalajara Zoo. This 2,000-footdeep gorge was cut by the Santiago and Verde rivers. Thermal rivulets plunge down the red walls (except during the dry season). The greater the depth, the more tropical the climate: Papayas, oranges, guavas, bananas, mangoes and other fruits grown at the canyon bottom are marketed in Guadalajara.

A cable car leaves the rim in the morning to take workers to the power plant on the canyon floor. The best views are from the Parque Huentitán el Alto Mirador lookout area at the top of the gorge.

PLAZA TAPATÍA extends along Av. Miguel Hidalgo. A 7-block-long pedestrian walkway connects the Degollado Theater at the west end to the Cabañas Cultural Institute at the east end. The walkway enables visitors to see several of Guadalajara's downtown attractions without having to cross major streets. Underground parking lots also are along the route.

Plaza Tapatía is a prime spot for strolling and people watching. Vendors sell everything from candy to canaries. The festive atmosphere unfolds against a backdrop of flower beds, statues, fountains and reflecting pools, and there are myriad storefronts in which to browse or window shop.

Escritorios set up shop in the arcade close to the State Tourism Office. For centuries these typists, writers and editors have helped illiterate people fill out documents or write messages and correspondence, particularly love letters.

REGIONAL MUSEUM OF GUADALAJARA (Museo Regional de Guadalajara) is at Av. Liceo #60, a block north of the Government Palace. Housed in a former theological seminary dating from around 1700, it has been a museum since 1918. Exhibits focus on the history of Jalisco and western Mexico, and include pre-Hispanic artifacts, ethnological displays and a 1,715-pound meteorite discovered in the state of Zacatecas in 1792.

A collection of Spanish and Mexican art on the second floor features paintings from the school of Bartolomé Murillo. Phone: (33) 3613-2703.

UNIVERSITY OF GUADALAJARA is on Av. Juárez at Av. Enrique Díaz de León, behind the Expiatory Temple and 4 blks. w. of Revolución Park. The main building, French Renaissance in style, contains an Orozco mural. On the north side of Avenida Vallarta is the university tower, where cultural events are held regularly.

University of Guadalajara Museum of Arts (Museo de las Artes de la Universidad de Guadalajara) is opposite the main building on Juárez at Av. Enrique Díaz de León. It occupies a beautiful early 20th-century edifice that was once a primary school. The permanent collection consists primarily of contemporary Jaliscan and Mexican artists; traveling exhibitions are mounted regularly. Also on display are early Orozco murals. **Phone:** (33) 3134-1664.

#### What To Do

### **Dining**

Guadalajaran restaurants specialize in hearty tapatío fare. Specialties include grilled steaks; carne asada a la tampiqueña, broiled or roasted meat served with bacon and beans; pozole, a thick, hominy-based soup with hunks of *carnitas* (pork), tomatoes, cilantro and frequently chickpeas; and birria (stewed goat or pork in a spicy tomato broth).

Restaurantes campestres are country-style establishments that serve steaks and side dishes like beans, quesadillas and tortillas. The food is accompanied by mariachi music and entertainment-sometimes in the form of a *charreada*, or rodeo, giving willing customers the opportunity to go mano a mano with a young bull. Restaurantes campestres are located within the city and also along main highways outside the urban area.

There is also an astounding variety of street food. Inexpensive taquerías can be found along Plaza Tapatía; the freshly made corn tortillas are wrapped around a variety of meat or vegetable fillings. The Mercado Libertad (see Shopping) is a great destination where you can choose from countless tiny stands offering full-course comida corrida meals, tamales, enchiladas, quesadillas and other treats. You can also find cheese, fruit and pastries. Cleanliness levels vary, however, and anyone planning to nibble their way from stall to stall should keep in mind the possibility of bacterial contamination, especially if the food has been sitting for a long time.

Except at first-class hotels and restaurants where purified water is customarily used, be careful of drinking water; this includes the ice cubes in drinks. Avoid unpeeled raw vegetables and fruit as well as untreated milk and dairy products. See the Lodgings & Restaurants section for AAA Diamond designated dining establishments.

# **Shopping**

Fashionable shops and boutiques line Avenida Chapultepec between avenidas México and Niños Héroes in Guadalajara's Zona Rosa (Pink Zone). This upper-class area west of the historic center is frequented by tourists.

Malls dot the metropolitan landscape as well. La Gran Plaza Fashion Mall is a sleek three-story collection of stores and a movie theater multiplex on Avenida Vallarta near the Camino Real Hotel. The largest is Plaza del Sol, at avenidas López Mateos Sur and Mariano Otero southwest of downtown. Local restaurants and outdoor garden areas offer a break from shopping. City buses designated "Plaza del Sol" travel to the mall from Calzada Independencia in the vicinity of the Liberty Market.

Guadalajara also has an amazing number of shoe stores. Calle Esteban Alatorre, northeast of the historic center, is known locally as "shoe street." Galería del Calzado, on the west side of town at the intersection of avenidas México and Juan Palomar y Arias, is a shoe shopping center covering a square block.

# Sightseeing

Guadalajara is a convenient base for day excursions to the Lake Chapala communities of Ajijic, Jocotepec and Chapala; to the suburban handicraft centers of Tlaquepaque and Tonalá; to the town of Tequila, known for the production of one of Mexico's more potent brews; and to the suburb of Zapopan, home of the revered Virgin of Zapopan. Casual clothes are suitable for just about any sightseeing trip in the Guadalajara area, but shorts are frowned upon in churches.

# Sports and Recreation

Bullfighting fans head for the 25,000-seat Plaza de Toros Nuevo Progreso, northeast of downtown on Avenida Pirineos between Calzada Independencia Norte and Avenida Fidel Velasqués (across from Jalisco Stadium). From October through March, bullfights (corridas) take place most Sunday afternoons starting at 5. Tickets are sold at the bullring, or in advance through Ticketmaster; phone (33) 3818-3800. Spectators can opt for seats in the sun (sol) or shade (sombra); those in the shade are more expensive. Ask at your hotel about dates and ticket prices.

Although similar to the Western rodeos of the United States, the *charreada* is unmistakably Mexican. When Spanish explorers and conquerors reintroduced the horse (which had roamed the North American plains some 12,000 years earlier), only noblemen were permitted to ride. By the 19th century, the development of large haciendas (estates) for agricultural purposes made horses an

everyday necessity, and the *charro* (male rider) evolved from the requirements of raising livestock in open country.

Charros were resourceful, self-reliant men, familiar with the land and able to live off it. Charro contingents fought in the war to achieve Mexican independence, and cha*rreadas*, where native horseback riders gathered to show off their skills, became part of Mexican culture. The National Association of Charros (Asociación Nacional de Charros) was founded in Mexico City 1921, and in Guadalajara these events are still very popular.

Both *charro* and *escaramuza* (female) riders are expert at fancy horsemanship and roping. The focus is on style and finesse rather than competition, although some of the sidesaddle riding feats performed are of the daredevil variety. One of the chief pleasures of a *charreada* is viewing the elegantly ceremonial costumes on display (on both horses and riders). Men are decked out in white pleated shirts, black pants encrusted with silver buttons and a sombrero embroidered with gold or silver thread. Women wear lacy petticoats and brightly colored skirts decorated with lace and ribbons, and wear their hair braided and beribboned.

If you're looking for fun things to do with friends, the arena Lienzo Charros de Jalisco, Av. Dr. R. Michel #577 (near Agua Azul Park), presents a charreada most Sundays at noon with different events as well as mariachi music. Admission begins at about \$3 (U.S.); phone (33) 3619-0315.

**Soccer** (fútbol) is the most popular spectator sport. Professional team Club Deportivo Guadalajara (nicknamed "Chivas") plays home matches at 49,000-seat Akron Stadium (Estadio Akron). Somewhat resembling a volcano in shape, it has an exterior largely covered by grass. The stadium is on Guadalajara's west side, just off the periférico ring road (Avenida Periférico Poniente Manuel Gomez Morin) via Avenida Circuito JVC. For schedule and ticket information, visit the stadium's website or phone (33) 3777-5700.

Guadalajara's year-round mild, sunny weather is ideal for golf. Some private courses allow visitors to play for a greens fee and proof of membership in a U.S. club; others are closed to nonmembers on weekends and holidays. Admittance to the immaculately maintained, 18-hole course at the Guadalajara Country Club is through a member, although the better hotels may be able to get their guests in. The country club is off Avenida Avila Camacho, about 8 kilometers (5 miles) northwest of the downtown historic center.

The Atlas Country Club (18 holes) is southeast of the city, on Mex. 23 just south of Tlaguepaque (on the way to Lake Chapala); phone (33) 3689-2620. The Santa Anita Golf Club is on Mex. 15, about 7 kilometers (4 miles) south of the Periférico loop road; phone (33) 3686-0321.

Colomos Park (Pargue Colomos), south of Avenida Patria and west of the country club in the city's western sector, has a track and tree-lined paths for **jogging**, and offers a variety of fun things to do outdoors.

### Nightlife

Inquire at the front desk or ask a bellboy about fun places to go during your Guadalajara vacation. Bars and clubs tend to be concentrated in two places: in the historic downtown center, and along Avenida Vallarta in the vicinity of Minerva Circle, an area of hotels and shopping west of downtown.

Several theaters show foreign and repertory films, including the Cine Cinematógrafo, Av. Vallarta #1102 (2 blocks west of the University of Guadalajara Museum of Arts), and Cine-Teatro Cabañas, in the Cabañas Cultural Institute at the eastern end of Plaza Tapatía. Malls such as Plaza del Sol have multiplexes showing the latest American releases.

On Thursday and Sunday evenings the Jalisco State Band gives free performances at Plaza de Armas, across from the Government Palace. The music starts at 6:30 p.m., but if you want a seat at one of the benches arrive at least half an hour early.

#### Theater and Concerts

Probably the grandest spectacle in town is the presentation of the University of Guadalajara's Ballet Folklórico in the Degollado Theater. Regional dances are complemented by estudiantinas or rondallas string ensembles, the Mexican counterpart of American high school marching bands or drum-and-bugle corps. Performances take place Sunday mornings at 10 a.m. in July and August; phone the box office at (33) 3614-4773 for more information.

The Jalisco Philharmonic Orchestra (Orguesta Filarmónica de Jalisco) performs on Sundays at 12:30 p.m. (and seasonally at other times) at the Degollado Theater. National and international artists appear at the theater as well. The Cabañas Cultural Institute presents various theater, dance and musical performances throughout the year. Chamber music recitals take place in the institute's Tolsá Chapel. The English-language Guadalajara Reporter publishes schedules of current events.

If you're interested in out-of-the-ordinary fun things to do with friends, take in a performance at the Experimental Theater of Jalisco (Teatro Experimental de Jalisco), on Calzada Independencia Sur next to the entrance to Agua Azul Park. The University of Guadalajara's theater company is headquartered here. Performances are in Spanish; phone (33) 3619-1176.

### Special Events

Guadalajara's biggest annual event is the October Fair (Fiestas de Octubre). This month-long artistic and cultural festival offers concerts, ballet, opera, theater, movies, folk art expositions and live music. Events take place at various locations, many in the vicinity of Plaza Tapatía, where outdoor stages and pavilions are set up. Hotel and ticket reservations are highly advised for the entire month of October and should be made in advance.

Major celebrations are held on Independence Day, on Sept. 15, and for the return of the Virgin of Zapopan to the Basilica of Zapopan on Oct. 12 (see Zapopan). Cultural events take place the last 2 weeks of February before the beginning of Lent.

Other festivities with a special *tapatío* flavor are the Day of the Three Wise Men on Jan. 6; the National Ceramics Fair, in Tlaquepaque during mid-June; the Day of St. James the Apostle in Tonalá on July 25, which features a mock battle with participants representing Indians and Spaniards; and Day of the Dead celebrations Nov. 1-2. Most of these events include *tianguis* (open-air markets), charreadas (rodeos), fireworks, costumed dancers, mariachi bands and vendors selling regional food specialties.

The Christmas holidays in Guadalajara are celebrated with *pastorelas*, folk representations of the birth of Christ, and *posadas*, re-enactments of Mary and Joseph's search for an inn. The city's museums often participate, offering traditional dance programs and providing special refreshments. Families also get together to take part in candlelight processions to each other's homes, and nativity scenes are set up in churches and plazas. If you'll be visiting during December, check with your hotel, the Jalisco State Tourism Office or the bulletin boards at museums for further information.





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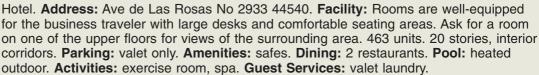


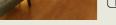




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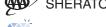
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#### **GUANAJUATO, GUANAJUATO**

Guanajuato (gwah-nah-HWAH-toh), capital of the samenamed state, is one of Mexico's most beautifully preserved colonial cities, with leafy plazas and flowerpotbedecked alleyways that exude charm. In an age of global information sharing and pop culture predominance, it is a city that has remained thoroughly Mexican in character.

Founded by the Spanish in 1548, Guanajuato (the name means "place of frogs") enjoyed early prosperity thanks to the rich deposits of silver that were extracted from surrounding mines. The establishment of a university by the Jesuits in 1732 ensured its reputation as an intellectual center and seat of learning.

Ironically, the city that became wealthy under Spanish rule also played an integral role in the struggle for Mexican freedom. In 1810, Guanajuato was invaded by a motley army of peasant farmers, miners and other disenfranchised citizens under the leadership of Father Miguel Hidalgo de Costilla. The town was sacked, and many Spanish Royalists—mining barons and the landowning elite—were massacred. But the revolutionaries didn't remain in control for long; the following year Hidalgo and three of his leaders were executed and their heads were hung from hooks protruding from the four corners of the town granary, where they remained impaled until Mexico finally won its independence in 1821.

Guanajuato is built on the slopes of a narrow, rugged canyon. Houses hug the canyon's different levels, with the foundation of one house sitting at the rooftop level of the one below. Gas stations and other concessions to contemporary life are restricted to the suburbs and outlying areas, allowing the downtown core to maintain a Spanishinfluenced architectural integrity, and the twisting streets are a delight to explore.

#### **Practicalities**

Del Bajío International Airport (also known as Guanajuato International Airport) is about 30 kilometers (18 miles) west of downtown via Mex. 110-D to Mex. 45 (Carretera Silao-León), then northwest on Mex. 45 to Km marker 5.5. American Airlines, Delta, United and Volaris offer direct flights from U.S. cities. Other airlines providing service to the airport include Aeroméxico and Aeroméxico Connect. From the airport, a taxi ride to Guanajuato takes about 30 minutes and costs around 400 pesos. For additional information about airlines see Arriving by Air, page p. 28.

Central Camionera, the main bus station, is about 6 kilometers (3.5 miles) southwest of downtown. First-class bus service is offered by ETN and Omnibus de México. There is frequent service between Mexico City's Terminal del Norte (North Bus Terminal) and Guanajuato. The Flecha Amarilla line has service from Guanajuato to San Miguel de Allende several times daily. For additional information about buses see Bus Service, page p. 36.

Local buses navigate several routes. One runs from downtown east along Mex. 110, passing several hotels along the way, and heads in the direction of the La Valenciana Church, the La Valenciana Mine and the town of Dolores Hidalgo. Buses designated "Presa-Estación" basically travel from one end of town to the other; they use the subterranean avenue if going toward the La Olla Reservoir and above-ground streets if going toward the train station. Another line takes tourists to the popular Mummy Museum. All schedules are subject to frequent change; the State Tourism Office can provide helpful bus information.

The city's high altitude guarantees mild weather yearround. Daytime highs are usually in the low or mid 70s except in April and May, when they climb into the low 80s. Nighttime lows are usually in the 40s and 50s, although winter nights can be chillier. Showers or thunderstorms occur from June through September, but the weather is usually dry and sunny. Bring a couple of sweaters and a jacket or light coat if you're visiting in the fall or winter. Comfortable walking shoes are a must, not only for the cobblestoned street surfaces but for climbing the numerous hills.

Guanajuato has a large student population and an active social and cultural life. The city is small, and most establishments are casual and friendly. Tourist crime occurs infrequently, and personal safety is essentially a matter of taking the usual common sense precautions.

# City Layout

Attempting to negotiate Guanajuato's narrow, congested and utterly illogical streets by car is a classic exercise in frustration. Furthermore, there are practically no local car rentals available. Most maps, including those available from the State Tourism Office, fail to show the winding, often unmarked streets in perspective. If you're staying at a hotel outside of the city, use local transportation for forays into and around downtown. Taxi stands (sitios) are located around Plaza de la Paz and the Jardín Unión, and taxis also can be hailed on the street. Always establish the fare before setting out.

Unlike many Mexican cities, where the streets are laid out in an orderly grid pattern radiating from a central plaza, downtown Guanajuato's twisting thoroughfares simply follow the dictates of the terrain. The two main streets, Avenida Juárez and Calle Pocitos, run one way roughly east to west. Juárez is closed to vehicular traffic east of the basilica, and past Jardín Unión its name

changes to Avenida Sopeña. Pocitos runs north of Juárez and changes names from Lascuraín de Retana to Pocitos to 28 de Septiembre as it travels from east to west.

Traffic going west to east uses Avenida Subterránea Miguel Hidalgo, an antiquated tunnel which in the mid-1960s was transformed into a vehicular route for inbound traffic. It follows the original course of the Río Guanajuato under the city—roughly parallel with Avenida Juárez/Sopeña—for about 1.5 miles. Mexican engineers rerouted the river following a flood in 1905. Street-level exits are just beyond the Hidalgo Market, at Plazuela de los Angeles, at Jardín Unión and at the subway terminus at Plaza Allende.

A confusing network of subsidiary tunnels attempts to alleviate the heavy traffic; the city's layout was never intended to accommodate automobiles. Even horse-drawn carriages cannot fully negotiate the steep streets. It's much easier for visitors to explore on foot. Another option is to take a guided tour. Transportes Turísticos de Guanajuato offers excursions in and around the city aboard a streetcar called "El Quijote." The office is underneath the Basilica of Our Lady of Guanajuato (Basilica Nuestra Señora de Guanajuato) on Plaza de la Paz; phone (473) 732-2134.

The best starting point for the Panoramic Highway (Carretera Panoramica), the scenic loop road that travels around Guanajuato's periphery, is from Mex. 110 just south of the Real de Minas Hotel (north of downtown). This route offers easy access to such attractions as the El Pípila Statue, Acacia Park, La Olla Dam, the Mummy Museum at the city cemetery (El Panteón) and the Church of La Valenciana.

Grupo Turístico Minero offers guided, 4-hour van tours of the city that include a visit to such attractions as the La Valenciana Mine, the Mummy Museum and the Statue of El Pípila. Tours depart daily; the fee is 280 pesos per person. Advance reservations are required; phone (473) 734-1669.

Discovered in 1760, La Valenciana Mine at one point was said to produce more than a fifth of the world's silver. The outer walls were peaked to symbolize the crown of Spain. It was reactivated in the late 1960s after decades of lying in ruin, and still brings up silver, lead and nickel. The mine shaft is exceptionally wide and more than 1,500 feet deep; visitors can look down it but are not permitted to descend.

#### **Events**

Guanajuato's biggest cultural event is the annual Cervantino International Arts Festival (Festival Internacional Cervantino). University of Guanajuato students first began presenting *entremeses*—skits—of Spanish author Miguel

de Cervantes' work in the early 1950s at the Plaza de San Roque.

For 2 to 3 weeks in October (sometime extending into early November), Mexican as well as international actors, dance companies and symphony orchestras perform at plazas and in theaters across the city. Theater performances are reserved, paying events, but the open-air performances in the plazas are often free. The farcical *entremeses*, presented mostly in pantomime, are easily grasped even if you don't understand Spanish. Ballet, films and classical, jazz and rock concerts round out the offerings.

The festival draws huge crowds and the narrow streets can become extremely congested, something to keep in mind if you're staying in the city. Reservations need to be made months in advance for the top events; if Guanajuato hotels are full, an alternative is to stay in San Miguel de Allende. For additional information contact Festival Cervantino; phone (473) 731-1221. Tickets can be ordered through Ticketmaster; phone (55) 5325-9000.

Day of the Dead, or Día de Los Muertos, is celebrated Nov. 1 and 2. *Posadas*, re-enactments of Mary and Joseph's search for an inn, take place during the Christmas season. The arrival of the Virgin of Guanajuato is commemorated in late May and again on Aug. 9. These festivals usually include fireworks, regional dance groups and sometimes a parade.

### **Shopping**

The Hidalgo Market (Mercado Hidalgo), on Avenida Juárez west of the city center, occupies a building that resembles, with its glass windows and elaborate iron grillwork, a Victorian train station. There are two levels, with a peripheral walkway above roamed by souvenir vendors and containing shops selling crafts, clothing and sombreros.

The produce, meat and sweet stands are where local families do their grocery shopping. Little eateries offer quick bites of typical Mexican fare. Everything from fruit to honey-laced candy is sold along row after row of these tidy stalls. Outside, flower vendors set up on the sidewalks. The market is open daily.

Bargainers may want to focus their skills on pottery purchases. Numerous types are sold, including the highly glazed, pale green and blue ceramic designs known as majolica or Talavera. Ceramic mugs and other items fashioned by Gorky González, a local artisan renowned for his Talavera-influenced work, are available at lower prices here than at his studio, which is located on Calle Pastita near Embajadoras Park (Parque de las Embajadoras).

# **Touring Guanajuato's Parks and Plazas**

Jardín Unión, in the center of town, is the city's lively focal point. This elegant park has old-fashioned lampposts, tiled, tree-shaded walkways, outdoor cafes and a

band shell that is the scene of frequent musical performances. Most of Guanajuato's downtown attractions are within easy walking distance. It's just off Avenida Juárez/Sopeña, and can be used as a point of orientation while exploring the downtown area.

Facing one side of this triangle-shaped plaza are the opulent Teatro Juárez and the Church of San Diego. Commissioned by Franciscan missionaries, the church was almost destroyed by floodwaters and rebuilt in the late 18th century. The doorway is a good example of the flamboyant Churrigueresque architectural style. Just off Jardín Unión is Plazuela del Baratillo, a peaceful spot for relaxing in the sol (sun) or sombra (shade) to the sounds of a gurgling fountain, a gift to the city from Emperor Maximilian.

West of Jardín Unión is Plaza de la Paz, anchored by the Basilica of Our Lady of Guanajuato, or Parish Church (La Parroquia). Adjacent to the plaza is the University of Guanajuato. Opulent private residences dating from the 18th and 19th centuries are a reminder of the days when silver poured out of the region's mines.

Continue down Avenida Juárez to Plazuela de Los Angeles, where the walls of the shops and houses are painted in bright colors. Close by is the Alley of the Kiss (Callejón del Beso), an intimate passageway narrow enough to permit a smooth from balconies on either side of the street; according to local legend, two lovers who were kept apart did just that.

Near Jardín de la Reforma, a shady park along Avenida Juárez a block or so from the Hidalgo Market, is Plaza de San Roque, a small square that is the site of many of the entremeses presented by university students as part of the Cervantes festival in October.

Equally engaging are the callejoneadas (kah-yeh-hohneh-AH-dahs), or serenades, that take place at Guanajuato's plazas or in the city streets on various weekend evenings. During these frolics, strolling student ensembles called estudiantinas dress in medieval costumes and sing songs with guitar and mandolin accompaniment. The public is welcome to join in the merriment.

The reservoir impounded by La Olla Dam (Presa de la Olla), built in the mid-18th century, provides Guanajuato's supply of drinking water as well as a recreational setting favored by local weekenders. This residential area at the east end of town can be reached via Paseo de la Presa or by taking a city bus designated "Presa."

Antillón Park is just below the dam. Flower gardens and a large statue of Father Miguel Hidalgo distinguish Acacia Park; picnicking is permitted, and rowboats can be rented for paddling around on the man-made lake.

Guanajuato State Tourism Office (Coordinadora Estatal de Turismo): Plaza de la Paz #14, across from the Basilica of Our Lady of Guanajuato. Open Mon.-Fri. 9-7:30, Sat. 10-5, Sun. 10-2. **Phone:** (473) 732-1982.

CHURCH OF LA VALENCIANA (Iglesia de la Valenciana) is about 4 km (2.5 mi.) n.w. of downtown on Mex. 110, toward Dolores Hidalgo; some parking is available along the road by the church. The Church of San Cayetano (Iglesia de San Cayetano) is commonly referred to as La Valenciana. It dates from 1788 and was constructed by the Don Antonio de Obregón Alconcer family, wealthy owners of the La Valenciana Mine.

The pink-stone facade, with its profusion of delicate carvings, is a fine example of the florid Churrigueresque architectural style. But it is the interior that is truly breathtaking, adorned with a soaring gilt and gold-leaf, ornately carved *retablo* (wall behind the main altar), which includes many life-size statues of saints and biblical figures. Two additional retablos, each as tall and as magnificent as the central decoration, grace the transepts on either side. Three huge oil paintings by Luis Monray Pinto depicting biblical stories hang along the side walls of the narthex.

On Dec. 8 a fiesta honors The Immaculate Conception (La Purísima). Buses designated "Valenciana" run from downtown Guanajuato to the church, which has provided services since its inception in the late 18th century. **Time:** Allow 30 minutes minimum.

DIEGO RIVERA MUSEUM (Museo Casa Diego Rivera) is at Calle Pocitos #47, 3 blks. n. of the Guanajuato State Museum; street parking is very limited. The city's most celebrated native son and one of Mexico's most esteemed muralists lived here the first 9 years of his life. The first floor of the home has been restored and is furnished with turn-of-the-20th-century antiques. The second and third floors contain more than 90 paintings. sketches and watercolors that trace the development of his style, influenced by both 20th-century Cubism and ancient Mayan techniques.

Political beliefs strongly informed Rivera's work, as evidenced by a sketch for the 1933 mural commissioned by Rockefeller Center in New York City that was destroyed because it included a portrait of Vladimir Lenin. Exhibit information is in Spanish. Restrooms are provided. Time: Allow 1 hour minimum. **Phone:** (473) 732-1197.

DON QUIXOTE ICONOGRAPHIC (Museo Iconográfico del Quijote) is at MUSEUM (Museo Iconográfico del Quijote) is at Manuel Doblado #1, about 2 blks. s.e. of Jardín Unión in an area of very limited street parking. Housing more than 700 pieces of art, this fascinating museum provides a look at the enduring literary character created by Spanish author Miguel de Cervantes as seen through the eyes of Pedro Coronel, Salvador Dalí, Pablo Picasso and other artists.

The pieces are displayed in rooms surrounding a three-story courtyard. Quixote and trusty companion Sancho Panza are executed in a variety of media, including paintings, sculpture, stained-glass windows, clocks, painted eggs, woodcarvings and one large leaf, complete with veins, that shows Cervantes' hero in profile on horseback. There also are huge wall murals and quartz, bronze, silver and porcelain statuary. Exhibit information is in Spanish. Restrooms are provided. **Time:** Allow 1 hour minimum. **Phone:** (473) 732-6721 or (473) 732-3376.

**GOVERNMENT PALACE** (Palacio de Gobierno) is on Paseo de la Presa near the La Olla Dam. It stands on the site of the old house of the Marqués of San Clemente. The original building was destroyed by a flood; the present structure was completed in 1903. It evokes a European elegance, enhanced by the use of Guanajuato green sandstone.

JUÁREZ THEATER (Teatro Juárez) faces Jardín Unión; street parking in the vicinity is very limited. Very European in appearance, it is a deliciously opulent reminder of Guanajuato's late 19th-century prosperity. The exterior is impressive, with tall columns, ascending steps, branching lampposts, bronze lions and statues of the Greek muses at the roof line.

Inside there are four levels of seating, private boxes and a smoking room with circular velvet settees, heavy drapes and a marble floor. The Moorish-style ornamentation includes dazzlingly intricate red-and-gold patterns on the walls and ceiling. It's a suitably grand setting for performances associated with October's Cervantino International Arts Festival.

Call for festival performance schedule. **Phone:** (473) 732-0183.

MARFIL is about 3 km (2 mi.) s.w. of Guanajuato off Mex. 110; the old road to Marfil (Camino Antiguo a Marfil) winds into a valley. At the height of this former mining town's

prosperity in the late 19th century, numerous silver mines operated and luxurious mansions lined the streets. Marfil was devastated in 1905 when La Olla Dam burst, killing many of the residents. In recent years Marfil has experienced a rebirth, with ongoing renovations sprucing up some of the long-neglected haciendas of the mine owners.

**Ex-Hacienda of San Gabriel de Barrera** (Museo Ex-Hacienda San Gabriel de Barrera) is at Camino Antiguo a Marfil Km marker 2.5, opposite the Hotel Misión Guanajuato. This former hacienda, which contains paintings and elegant Victorian-era furniture as well as a small chapel with an ornately carved *retablo* (decorative wall) behind the altar, offers a peek at the lifestyle enjoyed by privileged late 19th- and early 20th-century Mexicans. The gardens are a delight—more than a dozen, all beautifully maintained, whimsically named and distinctive with regard to plants and statuary.

**Time:** Allow 1 hour minimum. **Phone:** (473) 732-0619.

STATE HISTORICAL MUSEUM (Alhóndiga de Granaditas) is at Mendizábal and 28 de Septiembre (Calle Pocitos), n.w. of the city center; street parking in the immediate area is very limited. This massive 1809 structure was originally a seed and grain warehouse.

Among the varied exhibits are Indian weavings, saddles, leather clothing, hats, tools, pottery, *Carnaval* masks and a full-sized kitchen with period displays of pots and foods. Upstairs are historical exhibits and a number of pre-Columbian stone artifacts. Murals by José Chávez Morado depicting revolutionary themes embellish the Alhóndiga's stairwells. Bronze busts of War of Independence heroes Hidalgo, Jiménez, Aldama and Allende preside in a hall illuminated by an eternal flame.

Permanent and temporary exhibitions feature the work of Mexican and international artists, and a fine exhibit depicts Guanajuato's historical, social and mining importance through photographs and various artifacts. Exhibit information is in Spanish. Restrooms are provided. **Time:** Allow 1 hour minimum. **Phone:** (473) 732-1180.





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# MORELIA, MICHOACÁN

Travel Advisory: We do not recommend travel to the state of Michoacan due to the U.S. Department of State's "Do Not Travel" warning. The acute level of crime and violence in this area prohibits AAA inspections.

Capital of the state of Michoacán, Morelia (Moh-REHlee-ah) was founded in 1541. It was first known as Valladolid, after the Spanish birthplace of New Spain's first viceroy, Antonio de Mendoza. The name was changed in 1828 to honor native son José María Morelos, who became a general for and hero of the Mexican War of Independence.

Local building ordinances require that all new construction in the historic downtown area conform to the prevailing, richly decorated Spanish colonial architectural style. The Church and College of las Rosas (Templo y Colegio de las Rosas), established in the late 16th century as a Dominican convent, is home to the oldest school for liturgical music in the Western Hemisphere. This impressive building is on Avenida Santiago Tapia, 2 blocks north of Plaza de Armas, the main plaza. Visitors are welcome to attend rehearsals of Morelia's famed Boys' Choir, which has given performances in Rome and at Carnegie Hall.

An aqueduct (El Acueducto) dating from 1789 was once the primary means of bringing water to the city. It extends for more than a mile and is made up of 253 arches—the tallest 25 feet in height—that are illuminated at night. Some of the arches line two sides of Parque Villalongín and shelter small shops and private homes.

Extending east from this small park is Calzada Fray Antonio de San Miguel, a tree-shaded, three-block-long pedestrian street lined on both sides with stone benches. It runs to the Guadalupe Sanctuary (Santuario de Guadalupe) on Calzada Ventura Puente. This typically lavish baroque church was built in the early 18th century, although the highly ornate interior dates from the early 20th century.

The Michoacán State Museum (Museo del Estado) is half a block west of Plaza de Armas at Av. Guillermo Prieto #176. It has some nice examples of pre-Columbian pottery, as well as a collection of clothing and household items and a few paintings of local 18th- and 19th-century notables. The building housing the museum was once the residence of self-designated Mexican emperor Agustín Iturbide. Phone (443) 313-0629.

Folkloric dance performances and music recitals are regularly scheduled; check with the State Tourism Office for locations. Band concerts take place at Plaza de Armas on Sundays.

The Morelia Fair (Expo Feria Michoacán), held over 3 weeks from mid-June to early July, is a traditional state fair showcasing livestock and produce displays. In addition to a celebration of the city's founding in 1541, it also offers lots of live music performances. The event takes place at the Morelia Fairgrounds, west of downtown.

Such international artists as Philip Glass and the Kronos Quartet as well as nationally renowned orchestras like the Mexico City Philharmonic perform concerts during the Miguel Bernal Jimenez Music Festival (Festival de Música de Morelia), held from mid- to late November. The schedule of events also includes concerts for children. What makes this festival particularly special is the choice of venues, which includes architectural showcases like the Government Palace and the Municipal Palace. Along with concerts there are film showings and art exhibitions. Tickets for individual concerts should be purchased in advance.

#### **Practicalities**

General Francisco J. Mújica International Airport is about 20 miles (32 km) northeast of the city via Mex. 48-D or Mex. 120 (Carretera Acambaro/San José Huajámbaro/Morelia). American Airlines, United and Volaris offer direct flights from the United States. Other airlines that provide service to the airport include Aeroméxico and Aeromar. Airport-affiliated taxi services charge about \$25 (U.S.) per person between the airport and the city center. For additional information about airlines see Arriving by Air, page p. 28.

First-class bus service to Morelia from Mexico City's Terminal de Autobuses del Poniente (Western Terminal) is offered by ETN. The central bus station is near the intersection of avenidas Eduardo Ruíz and Gomez Farias, a couple of blocks northwest of the main plaza. A newer station, Terminal de Autobuses Morelia, is in the northwestern part of the city off Periférico Paseo de la República, across from the football stadium (Estadio José María Morelos y Pavón).

Buses, taxicabs and combis (usually white VW vans) all provide public transportation. Buses can be helpful for getting to and from Cuauhtémoc Woods Park and the Agueduct via Avenida Madero, but they move slowly along the crowded streets during rush hours. Combi vehicles have different-colored stripes depending on their destination. Taxis are not metered. The average in-town fare is normally about \$3-\$5 (U.S.); agree on the amount before getting in the cab.

# **City Layout**

Large, tree-lined Plaza de Armas is bounded on the north by Avenida Francisco I. Madero and on the south by Calle Allende. It also is known as the Plaza of the Martyrs (Plaza de los Mártires) in honor of the rebel priests who were executed during Mexico's War of Independence.

The square is surrounded by colonial-era buildings, and this part of the city is pedestrian-friendly (although congested with vehicles and vendors). Almost all of Morelia's visitor attractions are within walking distance of the plaza.

Downtown street names change north and south of Avenida Madero (Mex. 15), which is the principal eastwest artery. Two blocks west of Plaza de Armas, Avenida López Rayón becomes Gómez Farias north of Avenida Madero. A block west of the plaza, Calzada Galeana becomes Nigromante north of Madero. Avenida Abasolo, which runs along the west side of Plaza de Armas, becomes Guillermo Prieto north of Madero; a block east of Plaza de Armas. Avenida García Obeso becomes Juárez north of Madero.

East-west thoroughfares change names at the cathedral. West of the cathedral Avenida Madero is Poniente (Pte.); to the east it is Oriente (Ote.). Calle Allende, which runs along the south side of Plaza de Armas, becomes Valladolid once east of the cathedral.

Michoacán State Tourism Office (Secretaría de Turismo): adjoining Clavijero Palace, downtown at Calle Nigromante #79. In addition to maps and visitor information, the office can provide details about free guided walking tours of the city center. Open Mon.-Fri. 9-8, Sat.-Sun. 9-4. Phone: 01 (800) 450-2300 (toll-free long distance within Mexico).

GOVERNMENT PALACE (Palacio de Gobierno) faces the cathedral across Av. Acueducto (Mex. 15). This baroque building, a former seminary, serves as the state capitol and is the colonial prototype for all new city edifices. Murals painted by Alfredo Zalce, Morelia's famed artist, depict scenes from Mexico's often violent history.

# **Nearby Destinations**

About 32 kilometers (20 miles) north of Morelia on Mex. 43 is an unusual 19th-century causeway across Lake Cuitzeo. The town of Cuitzeo, on the lake's north shore. contains one of the region's two 17th-century Augustinian monasteries; the other is in the city of Yuríria, north of Cuitzeo and a short distance east off Mex. 43.

Two national parks with scenic views are east of Morelia on Mex. 15. José María Morelos National Park (Parque Nacional Insurgente José María Morelos) is about 26 kilometers (16 miles) east of the city. Cerro de Garnica National Park (Parque Nacional Cerro de Garnica), which has two miradores (observation points) overlooking the rugged Mil Cumbres (Thousand Peaks) landscape, is another 24 kilometers (15 miles) farther east. From here, Mex. 15 continues winding through steep mountains and dense forests to the town of Ciudad Hidalgo.



HOLIDAY INN EXPRESS MORELIA CENTRO HISTORICO, AN IHG

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Hotel. Address: 245 Portal Hidalgo 58000.



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Boutique Hotel. Address: Av Acueducto 344, Chapultepec Nte. Facility: Live like a rock star, at least for the night, when you book a room at this richly adorned hotel. There is a musical theme throughout paying homage to acclaimed singer-songwriter Marco Antonio Solis. Meets AAA guest room security requirements. 26 units, some two bedrooms, three bedrooms and kitchens. 6 stories, interior/exterior corridors. Parking: valet only. Amenities: safes. Dining: 2 restaurants. Pool: heated outdoor. Activities: sauna, hot tub, steamroom, exercise room, spa. Guest Services: valet laundry, area transportation.





























# HOTEL DE LA SOLEDAD BOOK NOW 443/312-1888



Historic Boutique Country Inn. Address: Ignacio Zaragoza 90, Centro Historico 58000. Facility: The interior courtyard is jaw-dropping with lush floral arrangements, customized art curios and copious water features. The artfully decorated rooms are in a building that dates from the 17th century. 40 units. 2 stories, interior/exterior corridors. Parking: valet only. Amenities: safes. Guest Services: valet laundry.















HOTEL NANAVIDA MORELIA BOOK NOW 443/719-2351



Historic Boutique Hotel. **Address:** 332 C La Corregidora 58000.

TUROTEL MORELIA BOOK NOW 443/333-1300



Hotel. Address: Ave Aqueducto No 3805, Col Fray Antonio de Lisboa 58254.

# PACHUCA, HIDALGO

Capital of the state of Hidalgo, Pachuca (pah-CHOOkah) is the center of a rich mining district that once produced much of the world's silver. It is believed that silver was mined before the arrival of the Spanish, who founded the city in 1534, and the surrounding hills are honeycombed with tunnels and heaped with slag piles. Although operations declined markedly by the mid-20th century, mining's influence remains in everything from museums to such historic buildings as the Cajas Reales, where miners once deposited one-fifth of their finds in the form of taxes to the Spanish crown.

The narrow, winding streets of the city center are lined with well-preserved buildings dating to the colonial era; some of the most impressive are along Calle Hidalgo in the vicinity of Plaza de la Constitución, the main plaza. Standing in the middle of the plaza is a local landmark, the Reloi Monumental (Monumental Clock). It was dedicated in 1910 to commemorate the centennial of Mexico's independence. The neoclassic-style tower, approximately 125 feet tall, was built from white cantera stone (a type of volcanic rock) and features four sculpted female figures.

City government offices are housed in the Casa Colorada (Red Houses) complex, built toward the end of the 18th century by the Count of Regla, who made his fortune from Pachuca's silver mines. The name refers to the building facades, which have a reddish color.

Also of interest is the 1596 Church and Ex-Monastery of San Francisco, begun in 1596 and completed around 1660. The Spanish baroque-style stone exterior is impressive, but the interior is breathtaking, the white walls decorated with a profusion of gold-leaf ornamentation. Much of the adjoining monastery now houses Fototeca, Mexico's national photography archive. The Casasola Archives (Archivo Casasola) contains an extensive collection of photographs chronicling Mexican history from the late 19th to early 20th centuries; the Mexican Revolution of 1910-20 is particularly well documented.

# **Nearby Destinations**

Northwest of Pachuca via Mex. 85 is the town of Actópan (ahk-TOH-pahn). The name means "in thick and fertile soil," appropriate considering the surrounding agricultural region. It was founded July 8, 1546, 10 years after Augustinian friars had first journeyed to the area to Christianize the indigenous people. The Toltecs, meanwhile, had arrived even earlier—perhaps as far back as the seventh century.

Please refer to pages 10-11 for Inspected Clean details.

In the nearby mountains are rock formations known locally as "The Friars," or Los Frailes. According to legend, these rocks were formed when God, angry with two friars who fell in love with a beautiful woman, turned all three people into stone.

Actópan's St. Nicholas Church and Monastery (Templo y Convento de San Nicolas), built in 1546, is distinguished by massive yet harmonious proportions. Impressive features include the patio. Renaissance-style doorway, frescoes and Gothic cloisters.

The 125-foot-tall bell tower, between the church entrance and the door to the monastery, resembles a giant vertical prism and suggests a Moorish influence. In the chapel ruins outside the church, parts of a mural fresco painted on the walls and ceiling can still be seen. Painted to impress newly converted Indians, it depicts the various punishments their souls would receive in hell if they were not good Christians.

Farther west on Mex. 85, between Actópan and Ixmiquilpan, is El Mezquital, an Otomí Indian region known for its embroidered clothing. Ixmiquilpan (ees-mee-KEEL-pahn) was once the Otomí capital. The town's Church and Monastery of St. Michael the Archangel is a huge, medieval-style fortress/complex and former monastery dating from 1550 and founded by the Order of St. Augustine. Inside the main church are Indian frescoes depicting imaginary beasts and warriors engaged in classic combat. The Church of El Carmen, graced by gilded altars, also is noteworthy.

Monday is market day in Ixmiquilpan; beautifully worked bags, mother-of-pearl-encrusted miniatures, guitars, wine bottle racks and Otomí belts are all for sale. Maguey is an important local crop. From this versatile plant paper, vinegar, molasses, medicines, rope and thread all are made. More potent derivatives include such alcoholic drinks as aguamiel, pulgue and mezcal.

About 11 kilometers (7 miles) northeast of Pachuca via Mex. 105 is Mineral Real del Monte, an old mining town with narrow, extremely steep cobblestone streets and aged buildings reminiscent of a Cornish village. Most of the houses were built more than 200 years ago, after the Count of Regla abandoned area mining operations and an English firm took over. Mex. 105 continues on to the picturesque town of Omitlán.

About 3 kilometers (1.9 miles) past Omitlán a road branches eastward off Mex. 105 to Huasca, another village, and the nearby 18th-century smelting haciendas of Santa María Regla and San Miguel Regla. The two complexes are now historical lodgings, with rooms, restaurants and other facilities occupying many of the original buildings.

From Mineral Real del Monte a paved road travels northwest to another old mining town, Mineral El Chico. En route is El Chico National Park, an area of enormous rock formations and cool pine woods.

Tourism Office (Secretaría de Turismo y Cultura del Estado de Hidalgo): Blvd. Everardo Márguez #202. Open Mon.-Fri. 8:30-4:30. Phone: (771) 717-6400 (tollfree long distance within Mexico).

# PATZCUARO. MICHOACAN

Travel Advisory: We do not recommend travel to the state of Michoacan due to the U.S. Department of State's "Do Not Travel" warning. The acute level of crime and violence in this area prohibits AAA inspections.

Pátzcuaro (PAHTZ-kwah-roh), built on the hills sloping back from Lake Pátzcuaro, has red and cream-colored churches, mansions and other buildings erected during 3 centuries of Spanish rule. It also boasts one of Mexico's loveliest colonial plazas: Plaza Vasco de Quiroga, named for the first Spanish bishop of Michoacán, who introduced Christianity and various craft industries to the region's Tarascan Indians. A statue of "Tata Vasco" gazes down from a stone fountain in the center of the plaza.

A block north of Plaza Vasco de Quiroga is Plaza Gertrudis Bocanegra, named in honor of a woman who was executed by firing squad in 1818 for staunchly supporting the War of Independence. This is the commercial center of town; the market on the plaza's west side bustles with food, clothing and craft stalls.

Many of the colorful native dances performed throughout Mexico originated in this area. One of the most widely known is "Los Viejitos" (the little old men), a witty commentary on the manners and foibles of age.

First-class bus service is provided by the Herradura de Plata line between Mexico City's Terminal de Autobuses del Poniente (Western Terminal) and Pátzcuaro's Central Bus Station (Central Camionera), on the southwest outskirts on Avenida Circunvalación, a loop road encircling town.

Michoacán State Tourism Office: A branch office (Delegación Regional de Turismo) is at Calle Buena Vista #7, on the northwest side of Plaza de la Basilica (a block northeast of Plaza Vasco de Quiroga), near the parish church. Open Mon.-Fri. 10-3 and 4-7, Sat.-Sun. 10-2. **Phone:** (434) 342-1214 (English may not be spoken).

# PUEBLA, PUEBLA

Puebla (PWEH-blah), capital and commercial center of the state of Puebla, is located in a large valley flanked by four volcanoes: Popocatépetl, Iztaccíhuatl, Malinche and



Citlaltépetl (Pico de Orizaba). A product of the Spanish conquest, the city was established in 1531 by colonists to whom Spain had granted land and Indian slaves. Legend maintains that one of these founders, Bishop Julian Garcés, was visited by angels who showed him where the new settlement was to be located—hence the nickname Puebla de los Angeles, or City of the Angels.

Strategically located along trade routes between the Gulf of Mexico coast and Mexico City, Puebla became a travel stopover between the coast and the interior, and also developed into a major center of the Catholic church; today's city is filled with churches and former convents. By the late 18th century it also was an important producer of pottery and textiles.

History was made at forts Loreto and Guadalupe on May 5, 1862, when about 4,000 poorly armed Mexicans defeated some 6,500 well-trained French troops who invaded the country as part of emperor Napoleon III's attempt to add to his empire. This rare Mexican military victory was greeted with a huge outpouring of national pride, and Gen. Ignacio Zaragoza became a hero, despite the fact that French reinforcements arrived the following year to install Archduke Maximilian as emperor of Mexico while president Benito Juárez's government was still in disarray. The event gave rise to the many Cinco de Mayo celebrations that take place in cities both north and south of the border.

Spain's legacy is still much evident in Puebla. Visually it is represented by the Talavera tiles (azulejos) that adorn buildings both old and new. These colorful hand-painted tiles were introduced from Talavera de la Reina, a town near Toledo. Spanish tile-makers settled in Puebla, which was the first city in Mexico to produce these decorative wares. You'll see Talavera tiles on church domes, fountains, rooftops and on walls in combination with red brick.

The *china poblana* dress, the national folkloric costume for women, is another *poblano* icon. It is worn on occasion by little girls as well as older women. Charras (female rodeo riders) and dancers performing the jarabe tapatío (Mexican hat dance) also don the garment.

The traditional ensemble is an ankle-length, sequinstudded red flannel skirt, an embroidered white blouse and a shawl (rebozo) worn around the shoulders and folded across in front. Decorative accents include colorful strands of beads and a red or green head bow. The green, white and red colors replicate the Mexican flag. A monument to La China Poblana, a rather monumental statue standing atop a tiled fountain, is at the northern end of the city at the intersection of Boulevard Héroes del 5 de Mayo and Avenida Defensores de la República.

Puebla also is known for its distinctive cuisine. *Mole* (mo-LEH), the Náhuatl Indian word for sauce, comes in a variety of guises; many of these complex concoctions

were painstakingly developed by Dominican convent nuns. Popular versions are *poblano*, a blend of chiles and bitter chocolate; pipian, which mixes chiles and pumpkin or squash seeds; and adobo, a pairing of cumin and a variety of regional chiles.

Another signature dish is *chiles en nogada*, created by the nuns to honor Agustín de Iturbide, emperor of Mexico 1822-23. A large green poblano chile pepper is filled with a mixture of cooked chicken or pork, onions, garlic, raisins and other dried or candied fruit. It is topped with a creamy white sauce made from ground walnuts and sprinkled with parsley and red pomegranate seeds, the colors again recalling the Mexican flag. Restaurant menus normally feature *chiles en* nogada seasonally (July through September).

Camotes, confections made of sweet potato paste molded into the shape of a stick and flavored with fruit, are sold by street vendors, along with sweet potatoes, plantains baked in wood-burning stoves and tacos arabes, seasoned roast pork rolled into puffy wheat tortillas or pita bread.

The ubiquitous *cemita* is a big bread roll containing meat (usually ham), mild white cheese and avocado and seasoned with chiles or herbs. While these tasty snacks should all be safe to eat, it's best to avoid sno-cones, popsicles and ice cream—even on a hot day—since the water used to make them may not be purified.

Major events include Holy Week, which is observed Palm Sunday to Easter Sunday, and the Puebla State Fair (Feria de Puebla), a monthlong celebration that begins in mid-April and takes place at the fairgrounds within the 5 de Mayo Civic Center complex. The Huey Atlixcóyotl Fiesta is held in late September. This dance and music celebration was once presented as an offering to the god Quetzalcóatl in return for a bountiful harvest season. The festivities take place in the town of Atlixco, southwest of Puebla via Mex. 190-D.

#### **Practicalities**

Hermanos Serdán International Airport is about 22 kilometers (13 miles) west of Puebla via Mex. 190, the Mexico-Puebla Highway (Carretera México-Puebla), at Km marker 91.5 near the town of Huejotzingo. Airlines offering service to the airport include Aeroméxico Connect, American, VivaAerobus and Volaris. Most travelers, however, fly into Mexico City and take a bus to Puebla, which is convenient and easy. For additional information about airlines see Arriving by Air, page p. 28.

Estrella Roja buses depart frequently for Puebla from both Benito Juárez International Airport in Mexico City and Mexico City's eastern bus terminal, Terminal de Autobuses de Pasajeros de Oriente (TAPO). The TAPO terminal is

near the airport at Calzada Ignacio Zaragoza #200; the closest Metro subway stop is San Lázaro, line 1.

Look for the Estrella Roja line at the airport. The departure time is printed on the ticket. The nonstop trip takes about 2 hours; the one-way fare is around \$20 (U.S.). Tickets are nonrefundable. Estrella Roja buses arrive at Puebla's main bus station, Central de Autobuses de Puebla (CAPU), which is located in the northwestern part of the city about 4 kilometers (2.5 miles) from the *Zócalo*. They also arrive at the station at Avenida 4 Poniente near Calle 11 Norte (5 blocks west of the *Zócalo*). The latter station is closer to downtown Puebla (*centro*); at the airport or the TAPO terminal, buy a ticket with the destination "Puebla Terminal 4 Poniente" (4 Pte.).

Taxi Autorizado kiosks at the CAPU bus terminal sell government-authorized tickets for white-and-yellow taxis. The fare to specific destinations is based on a zone system; maps at the kiosks show the different zones. Pay the kiosk attendant for your ticket and tip the driver (10 percent of the fare is appropriate).

By car from Mexico City, Puebla is about a 3-hour drive via free Mex. 190; the drive time is about 90 minutes via toll Mex. 150-D. Mex. 190 is scenic but slow, with more traffic and some bumpy stretches. To access either highway from downtown Mexico City, take the major eastwest city thoroughfare Viaducto Miguel Alemán east toward Benito Juárez International Airport, exiting east at the junction with Calzada Ignacio Zaragoza; Zaragoza becomes Mex. 190. Heading east, watch for the signs to access Mex. 150-D.

Most of Puebla's museums and other tourist attractions are within a 4-block walk of the main plaza, or *Zócalo*. For getting around the city public buses are plentiful, and the fare is inexpensive (less than 10 pesos). Exact change is required. Hailing one of the black city cabs that cruise the streets is not recommended. Driving in the historic center also should be avoided, since traffic congestion is heavy and there are few public parking spaces.

# **City Layout**

Just as Puebla was long second in importance to Mexico City in New Spain, it is bypassed by many tourists today. There is much to see, however, in this city that was designated a World Heritage Site by UNESCO in 1987. A mix of old and new, Puebla has both imposing glass towers and colonial-era buildings featuring ornamental wrought iron and walls adorned with Talavera tiles.

The Zócalo is a classic Mexican plaza with a bandstand, shoeshine stands and lots of iron benches. It is flanked on three sides by broad stone arches (portales) that shelter restaurants, sidewalk cafes and a warren of little shops. Sundays are particularly festive; dressed-up families stroll

together after Mass, and in the evening there are sidewalk entertainers and vendors selling balloons and all kinds of snacks.

The surrounding narrow, cobblestone streets form a grid pattern that adheres to the classic blueprint for cities built by the Spanish in Mexico. Although they become poorer and more dilapidated as you head farther away from the city center, the streets in the vicinity of the *Zócalo* are lined with carefully preserved buildings in a mix of Churrigueresque, baroque and neoclassic architectural styles. Recurring motifs include the liberal use of Talavera tile, ornate white stucco ornamentation known as *alfeñique* (the name comes from a sweet confection made of almond paste) and gray stone carved into all sorts of curlicues, cherubs, gargoyles and other decorative accents.

Noted for its French Renaissance design is City Hall (Palacio Municipal), on the north side of the *Zócalo* at Portal Hidalgo #14. Intricate stone carvings adorn the exterior of the Theater (Teatro Principal), about 4 blocks northeast of the *Zócalo* at Avenida 8 Oriente and Calle 6 Norte. Dating from 1760, it is among the oldest theaters in the Americas (although it was rebuilt in the 1930s). The interior can be toured when performances are not taking place; for information check the Puebla State Tourism Office.

A striking contrast is provided by the William O. Jenkins Convention Center (Centro de Convenciones William O. Jenkins), an impressive example of preserving the character of historic buildings—in this case, four ancient textile factories—while grafting on contemporary additions. The complex is worth a visit for its architecture alone. It is located at the eastern end of the historic district along Boulevard Héroes del 5 de Mayo, between avenidas 4 and 10 Oriente and just south of the Church of San Francisco.

The downtown street system is based on numbers rather than names. The northwest corner of the *Zócalo* is the city center; from this point, the main thoroughfares are north-south Avenida 5 de Mayo/16 de Septiembre and east-west Avenida Palafox y Mendoza/Reforma. East-west streets are even-numbered north of the *Zócalo* and odd-numbered south of it. Likewise, north-south streets are odd-numbered west of the *Zócalo* and even-numbered east of it.

Street names also include a direction—north/norte, south/sur, east/oriente or west/poniente—based on the axis of Avenida Reforma and Avenida 5 de Mayo. This makes it a bit easier to find the location of addresses, since the city is essentially divided into four quadrants.

**Puebla State Tourism Office (Secretaría de Turismo):** Avenida 5 Oriente #3, a block south of the *Zócalo* and across the street from the cathedral. Open Mon.-Sat. 10-7, Sun. 10-1. **Phone:** (222) 246-2044.

Shopping: Among the city's long-established Talavera workshops is Uriarte Talavera (Taller de Cerámica Uriarte), 5 blocks west of the Zócalo at Avenida 4 Poniente #911. Factory tours to observe the ceramics being molded, hand painted, fired and cooled are given, and they also will ship your purchases. Tours are offered Monday through Friday afternoons, subject to guide availability; phone (222) 232-1598 to confirm tour schedule.

El Parián Market. 3 blocks east of the *Zócalo* between calles 6 and 8 Norte, offers typical crafts from this part of Mexico, including Talavera pottery, trees of life and onyx jewelry. The open-air shops are in a pedestrian-only area. Bargaining is expected.

Plazuela de Los Sapos (Plaza of the Toads), bounded by avenidas 3 and 5 Oriente and calles 4 and 8 Sur, is lined with shops offering antique furniture and collectibles as well as new furniture made to look old. The Artists' Neighborhood, in a pedestrian passageway at Avenida 6 Oriente and Calle 6 Norte (behind the Theater), is a concentration of studios where local artists create and sell their work.

AMPARO MUSEUM is 3 blks. s. of the *Zócalo* at Calle 2 Sur #708 (at Calle 9 Oriente); street parking Calle 2 Sur #708 (at Calle 9 Oriente); street parking in the vicinity is limited. It contains one of the finest collections of pre-Hispanic art in Mexico, as well as pre-Columbian, colonial and modern works. The exhibits are housed in a two-story complex with several outdoor courtyards and fountains.

Two floors are filled with Olmec art, Nayarit clay figurines and other objects, including such whimsical pieces as a figure wearing a long conical hat and another strapped to a bed while a laughing dog peers through the framed headboard. One of the museum's most delightful works is a mural that depicts four angels creating the colonial town of Puebla. Colonial art (arte virreinal) is on the second floor. There also are frequent rotating exhibits. Background information is presented in both Spanish and English.

**Time:** Allow 2 hours minimum. **Phone:** (222) 229-3850. (11)

BELLO Y GONZÁLEZ MUSEUM is a blk. w. of the Zócalo at Av. 3 Poniente #302. The museum's collection of art and artifacts was donated to the city by the son of José Luis Bello, a textile magnate and collector. Beautifully hand-carved furniture, glassware, porcelain, gold and silver articles, paintings, ironwork from the 17th to 19th centuries and a large collection of Talavera pottery are all on display, as well as several huge ocean-going travel trunks equipped with hidden locks and latches. Time: Allow 1 hour minimum. **Phone:** (222) 232-9475. **GT** 

FORTS LORETO AND GUADALUPE (Fuertes de Loreto y Guadalupe) are in a park about 2 km (1.2 mi.) n.e. of the city center; take Calle 4 Norte to Blvd. 5 de Mayo, then follow Calzada Zaragoza/Calzada de los Fuertes. The remains of Fort Guadalupe stand on a hill (Cerro de Guadalupe) overlooking the city below; only the walls and cannons remain.

Fort Loreto is about a 20-minute walk downhill. The remodeled fort contains the No Intervention Museum (Museo de la No Intervención), which is dedicated to the Battle of Puebla on May 5, 1862, when a force of 4,000 Mexicans led by General Ignacio Zaragoza defeated an army of 6,500 French troops. The museum houses a collection of oil paintings depicting the battle as well as displays of weapons, uniforms, documents and other items related to this important episode in Mexican history. Museum signage is in Spanish.

Also within the park is a monument to the heroes of the battle. Time: Allow 1 hour minimum.

REGIONAL MUSEUM OF THE MEXICAN REVOLUTION (Museo Regional de la Revolución Mexicana) is in the historic center at Av. 6 Oriente #206, between calles 2 and 4 Norte. Also known as the House of the Serdán Brothers. Puebla's most visited museum houses the personal belongings of the Serdán family, who played an important role in launching the revolution against dictator Porfirio Díaz. Don Aquiles Serdán and other patriots were killed in this colonial-style house on Nov. 18, 1910. Visitors can see the living room, kitchen and children's bedroom, the house's dispatch office and a shoe workshop (the family ran a nearby shoe business).

A memorial hall is dedicated to Mexican patriots, and one room features locally crafted, painted ceramic tiles emblazoned with an eagle, the country's national symbol. Other displays include a collection of rifles and cannon balls. A short, well-done video recounts the history of the house. Exhibit information is in Spanish.

Flash photography is not permitted. **Time:** Allow 1 hour, 30 minutes minimum. **Phone:** (222) 242-1076.

SAN PEDRO MUSEUM OF ART (San Pedro Museo de Arte) is 2 blks. n.e. of the *Zócalo* at Calle 4 Norte #203. This museum, housed in the restored Hospital of San Pedro, exhibits paintings, sculpture, ceramics, china and glassware from the Bello Y Gonzalez collection. The second floor displays antique pharmacy jars and other vessels engraved with the names of various plants, herbs and medicines. Rotating temporary exhibitions are devoted to contemporary Mexican artists.

**Time:** Allow 1 hour minimum. **Phone:** (222) 246-0431. GT

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# QUERÉTARO, QUERÉTARO

Querétaro (keh-REH-tah-roh) lies in a valley at the base of a hill called the Sangremal. The city was founded by Otomí Indians long before Europeans discovered the New World. It was captured by the Spanish in 1531 and developed as the headquarters for the Franciscan monks who established missions throughout Central America, Mexico and California.

Querétaro has played a pivotal role in Mexican history. The early 19th century saw the city as the center of rebellion against Spain. Doña Josefa (La Corregidora) and her husband, the local magistrate, formed the Society for the Study of Fine Arts to discuss poetry and politics; two of

Mexico's greatest revolutionary heroes, Father Miguel Hidalgo and Capt. Ignacio Allende, often attended. In 1810, when budding plots for national independence were uncovered, Doña Josefa alerted the principal insurgents of their impending arrest.

The city also was Mexico's capital 37 years later when U.S. troops took over Mexico City; the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo, which ceded California, Arizona and New Mexico to the United States, was formulated in 1848 at Querétaro's Academy of Fine Arts. During the War of Reform (1857-59), President Benito Juárez made Querétaro his headquarters. Emperor Maximilian's headquarters were here as well; he ended his 3-year reign before a firing squad on the nearby

Please refer to pages 10-11 for Inspected Clean details.

Hill of the Bells (Cerro de las Campañas), thus ending Europe's dream of controlling Mexico.

Elegant colonial architecture is concentrated in the historic downtown area, which was designated a World Heritage Site by UNESCO in 1996. The cobblestone streets are narrow but well maintained, with pedestrian-only thoroughfares (andadores) linking several plazas.

The central plaza is called Jardín Zenea; north-south Avenida Corregidora, downtown's main street, runs along its east side. Band concerts take place at the plaza on Sunday evenings at 6 p.m. Six blocks south is the large, tree-shaded Alameda.

Two blocks east of Jardín Zenea is Plaza de Armas (also called Plaza de la Independencia). On the plaza's west side, at the Portal de Dolores (Avenida Pasteur #6), is Ecala's House (Casa de Ecala). This building has what might be the most beautiful 18th-century baroque facade in the city; note the brick and stone staircases and the small window with an elaborate ornamentation of drapes sculpted in stone. Visitors can walk around the inner courtyard during normal business hours.

Among other notable downtown buildings is the Casa de la Marquesa, at Av. Madero #41. In the 18th century this elegant mansion was the residence of a wealthy family of royal blood; it now houses a hotel. The interior courtyard is graced with Moorish-style arches. Another hotel, the Mesón de Santa Rosa (on Plaza de Armas at Av. Pasteur #17) has three spectacular courtyards; in the middle one stands an old trough that once served to water guests' horses.

A block north of the Jardín Zenea at the corner of avenidas Corregidora and Hidalgo is the Theater of the Republic (Teatro de la República), built in neoclassic style between 1850 and 1852 and embellished with accents of olive leaves, crowns and shields. The Mexican Constitution was signed there in 1917.

A block west of the Jardín Zenea at Avenida Madero and Calle Allende is the Neptune Fountain (Fuente de Neptuno). It was designed by Eduardo Tresquerras, who was responsible for a number of the city's neoclassic buildings.

Another landmark is the 6-mile-long, 50-foot-high agueduct (acueducto), constructed by the Spanish more than 200 years ago and still supplying the city with water. Its 74 arches run along the center of east-west Avenida Zaragoza.

The state of Querétaro is known for its gemstones, especially opals. These should be purchased only at reputable shops; avoid sidewalk vendors. Lapidaria de Querétaro, on Calle Corregidora near the intersection of Calle 15 de Mayo (about 4 blocks north of Jardín Zenea), sells locally mined opals and other semiprecious stones.

The Plaza de Toros Santa María, south of downtown on Avenida Constituyentes, is one of Mexico's best bullrings, drawing top matadors from Mexico and Spain. The main season runs from November through January; phone (442) 216-1617.

Querétaro State Tourism Office (Secretaría de Turismo): Calle Luis Pasteur #4 Norte, just n. of Plaza de Armas. Open daily 9-8. Phone: (442) 238-5067, or 01 (800) 715-1742 (toll-free long distance within Mexico).

**GOVERNMENT PALACE** (Palacio Gobierno) is at the n. end of Plaza de Armas. Now housing the state of Querétaro offices, it was once the home of Doña Josefa Ortiz, or "La Corregidora" (the mayor's wife), the heroine of the 1810 War of Independence. Under house arrest, she whispered instructions through a keyhole to a messenger to warn insurgents Father Miguel Hidalgo and Capt. Ignacio Allende in the nearby town of Dolores. As a result, Hidalgo immediately issued his famous cry (grito) for independence. More than 50 years later, Archduke Maximilian presided over many meetings here.

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# SAN LUIS POTOSÍ, SAN LUIS POTOSÍ

Note: For current information about safety/security issues in San Luis Potosí, refer to the U.S. State Department website (travel.state.gov).

San Luis Potosí (sahn loo-EES poh-toh-SEE), capital of the state of the same name, was founded in the late 1500s as a mining settlement. The city was the seat of national government under President Benito Juárez in 1863 and again in 1867. The San Luis Plan, drafted by Francisco I. Madero while he was imprisoned in the city by dictator Porfirio Díaz, set the stage for the Revolution of 1910.

Despite a heavy manufacturing presence, today's city is not all soot and smoke. Plaza de Armas, the main square, anchors a well-preserved colonial center. The plaza is flanked by the 18th-century cathedral on the east and the Government Palace (Palacio de Gobierno) on the west.

Two blocks northwest of Plaza de Armas is Founders' Plaza (Plaza de Los Fundadores); 2 blocks east and a block south of Plaza de Armas is Plaza del Carmen. Two blocks west and 2 blocks south of Plaza de Armas is Plaza San Francisco. Each of these plazas is a pleasant spot to relax and observe passers-by.

The Plaza España bullring is on Avenida Universidad, at the eastern end of downtown near the southeastern corner of Alameda Park. On the north side of this large park is the city's train station, where a series of Fernando Leal frescoes depict the history of transportation in Mexico.

Holy Week (Semana Santa) celebrations are among the city's most traditional as well as most solemn. Various cultural, artistic and gastronomic events lead up to Good Friday, when there is a silent procession through the historic city center that begins at dawn.

More down to earth is the San Luis Potosí National Fair (Feria Nacional Potosina), which takes place the entire month of August. It features bullfights, rodeos, sports events, carnival rides, and agricultural and livestock exhibitions. Held in conjunction with the fair on Aug. 25 is the Day of St. Louis the King, honoring the city's patron saint with floats and huge papier-maché figures called gigantes.

San Luis Potosí State Tourism Office (Secretaría de Turismo): in the historic center at Blvd. Manuel José Othón #130, just e. of Plaza de Armas. Open Mon.-Fri. 8-8, Sat. 10-8. **Phone:** (444) 812-9939.

Shopping: Among the wares on display at the huge Hidalgo Market (Mercado Hidalgo), 4 blocks north of Plaza de Armas, are prized Santa María rebozos (shawl-like garments), so gauzy in texture they can be pulled through a woman's wedding ring; pottery; and a candy called queso de tuna made from the fruit of the prickly pear cactus. Calle Hidalgo between the market and Plaza de Armas is a pedestrian-only street flanked by numerous shops and stores.

The best place in the city to shop for handicrafts is the government-run FONART store on Plaza San Francisco, which stocks items from all over Mexico. Another good place to browse is La Casa del Artesano, Av. Carranza #540 about 5 blocks west of Plaza de Armas; it sells crafts from the state of San Luis Potosí.

FEDERICO SILVA MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY SCULPTURE (Museo Federico Silva Escultura Contemporánea) is downtown at Av. Alvaro Obregón #80, just n.



of Plaza San Juan de Dios (about 3 blks. e. of Plaza de Armas). This is the only museum in Mexico devoted entirely to sculpture, and the first in Latin America to focus on contemporary sculpture. Several large rooms on each of the two floors exhibit oversize metal and plaster sculptures as well as two large mobiles. Time: Allow 1 hour minimum. Phone: (444) 812-3848.

GOVERNMENT PALACE (Palacio de Gobierno) is just w. of Plaza de Armas. This neoclassic structure dates from 1770. Here Benito Juárez, despite petitions for mercy from all over the world, denied clemency to Archduke Maximilian; the deposed emperor was subsequently executed at Querétaro. A wax tableau and a portrait gallery in the Juárez Room recall the event.

NATIONAL MASK MUSEUM (Museo Nacional de la Máscara) is in the Zona Centro at Villerías #2, in Plaza Carmen across from the Teatro de la Paz. The museum is housed in an impressively ornate Italianate-style mansion, recently restored, that was built in the 1890s and once belonged to Spanish mining magnate Don Ramon Marti. Permanent exhibits on the first floor include traditional masks representing different historical eras. Many of the masks are placed on fully costumed manneguins to lend a feeling of authenticity.

The restored rooms on the upper level are decorated with period furnishings depicting the wealthy lifestyle enjoyed by the Marti family. Original family heirlooms can be seen in the bedroom, living room, ladies' parlor, men's smoking room, ballroom and chapel. The museum also features temporary exhibits of masks from around the world. Monitors throughout the museum show videos of traditional masked dances in subtitled English, but exhibit background information is in Spanish only.

Time: Allow 1 hour minimum. Phone: (444) 812-3025. (GT)

# SAN MIGUEL DE ALLENDE, GUANAJUATO

You sense that San Miguel de Allende (pronounced a-YEHN-deh) is special before you even get there. The feeling is reinforced in subtle ways: a family selling snacks along the roadside, a horse and rider clip-clopping contentedly in the distance, brown hills brightened by wildflowers. At this altitude the air has a refreshing coolness, even though the sun is bright. Small clusters of dwellings-tiny cement cubes with tin roofs-and dirt yards exhibit obvious poverty, but somehow seem less grim than the vast shantytowns ringing Mexico City.

Mex. 111, a local two-lane road that branches west off highway Mex. 57-D, is an unlikely gateway to the charm

that defines San Miguel. Its outskirts have that everyday scruffiness common to most Mexican towns—dilapidated gas stations mix with newer commercial development in a small-scale version of "suburban sprawl."

But as Mex. 111 twists and turns toward the center of town, things start to change. The street narrows and becomes cobbled. Aged buildings rub shoulders along a sidewalk barely wide enough for one pedestrian, let alone two. Open shop doorways offer quick glimpses of clothing and crafts.

Suddenly you're at a scenic overlook, a pull-off with a small parking area. A few vendors sit beside their wares piles of woven baskets, perhaps, or neatly arranged rows of painted ceramic figurines. Below a protective wroughtiron fence the town spreads out, filling a bowl-shaped valley. One structure towers above the others: multispired La Parroquía, the parish church (see attraction listing).

San Miguel began as a mission where Indians were evangelized and also taught European weaving and agricultural techniques. As it prospered, the settlement became a local market center for the surrounding haciendas trading in cattle and textiles. Historical significance made its mark as well: Here native son Ignacio Allende, along with Father Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla, a priest from the neighboring town of Dolores Hidalgo, planned the original uprising that led to Mexico's bitter and protracted War of Independence.

In 1926, the Mexican government designated the city a national historic monument, and preservation measures began in earnest. Modern construction was prohibited in the city center; crumbling old buildings were carefully restored. Foreigners began moving in during the 1930s, and today there is an established North American expatriate community of artisans, teachers, writers and part-time residents.

#### **Practicalities**

Guanajuato International Airport (also referred to as Del Bajio International Airport) is in León, about a 90-minute drive from San Miguel. Airlines that provide service to the airport include Aeroméxico, American, Delta, Interject and Volaris. For additional information about airlines see Arriving by Air, page p. 28.

Polanco Tours, a San Miguel tour company, offers van transportation to and from the airport. One-way fare is about \$72 (U.S.) for two passengers, plus \$10 for each additional passenger up to six; phone (415) 152-4193. Another local tour company, Viajes San Miguel, provides shuttle transportation to and from the airport (\$30 U.S. one way, \$58 round trip); phone (415) 152-2537 or (415) 152-2538.

"Deluxe" bus service from Mexico City's Terminal Central de Autobuses del Norte is provided daily by ETN; Primera Plus and Pegaso Plus provide first-class service. The trip is nonstop and takes about 3 hours. Second-class service by Flecha Amarilla and Herradura de Plata takes 4 hours and includes a stop in Querétaro and local stops en route. Flecha Amarilla buses also provide frequent service between San Miguel and Guanajuato. The central bus station is on the westward extension of Calle Canal, about 1.5 kilometers (1 mile) west of the center of town. For additional information about buses see Bus Service, page p. 36.

Taxis provide flat-rate service between the bus station and downtown, as well as to other locations around the city, for about \$3 to \$5 (U.S.). There is a *sitio* (cab stand) at the main plaza.

By car, the 180-mile journey from Mexico City takes 3 to 4 hours via Mex. 57-D to the Querétaro toll bypass (watch for the San Miguel exit). The bypass highway crosses Mex. 57-D north of Querétaro and connects with Mex. 111, which proceeds northwest to San Miguel. The trip along two-lane Mex. 111 is slow but scenic, offering views of typical Mexican rural life. From Guanajuato, take Mex. 45 and 45-D south and east toward Celaya, then Mex. 51 north.

**Note:** Street parking is scarce in the congested historic center, and local police do not hesitate to issue violators a ticket. If driving from Mexico City or elsewhere, you may have to park several blocks from the center. If you're staying in town and have a car leave it at your hotel, since almost everything of interest is within walking distance. The altitude may initially tire visitors not used to walking at higher elevations.

Banks along Calle San Francisco exchange currency Mon.-Fri. 9-1:30, but have long lines; the *casas de cambio* (currency exchange houses) located in the vicinity of the main plaza are a quicker alternative.

San Miguel's weather is warm and dry most of the year, but the city rarely experiences the extremes of heat common to much of Mexico. Winter nights can be chilly, and many hotels aren't heated (although some have fireplaces). The rainy season is June through September. In May an extra splash of color is added when the jacaranda trees are covered with purple blooms.

# **Exploring Around Town**

Some travelers complain that San Miguel's "gentrification," so to speak, has replaced authentic Mexican atmosphere with a touristy vibe—trendy restaurants, pricey boutiques and a lack of local grit. It's true that foreign investors have driven up prices, and the bright orange and red facades add a Disneyesque touch.

But a stroll through the historic center proves that these complaints are primarily quibbles. There is atmosphere to spare, from heavy carved wooden doors to intricate stone carvings adorning the windows of handsome old buildings. Their sheltered inner patios, cool retreats filled with trees, burbling fountains, clipped hedges and flowerpot urns, have a timeless beauty.

You'll see other tourists but also have plenty of opportunities to mingle with locals—perhaps children who shyly ask if you want to buy some gum ("Chicle"?), or an elderly gentleman whiling away the afternoon at El Jardín, the main plaza.

Make the plaza, located between calles San Francisco and Correo, your first stop. Shaded by Indian laurel trees, it's a great place to relax on a wrought-iron bench, listen to the tolling bells of La Parroquía and observe the local scene. Buy a cold drink and plan the day's itinerary. In the evening mariachi bands play, vendors sell *carnitas* (grilled pork) and *churros* (doughnut-like fritters), flocks of pigeons flutter and couples stroll. This is the city's heart.

Most attractions are within easy walking distance of the plaza, and the historic center is compact. Wear comfortable shoes; many streets are cobblestoned, and some are steep.

San Miguel's reputation as an arts center was established by the opening of the Allende Institute, southwest of downtown at Calle Ancha de San Antonio #20. One of its American founders, Stirling Dickinson, came to Mexico as a tourist in the 1930s and fell in love with the city. Fountains, arcades and courtyard gardens grace the grounds of the campus, which has extensive classroom space, two art galleries, a theater and a library.

The Bellas Artes Cultural Center (Centro Cultural Bellas Artes), about 2 blocks west of the main plaza at Calle Hernández Macías #75, also is called the Centro Cultural el Nigromante (its official name) and the Centro Cultural Ignacio Ramírez. It is a branch of the well-known National Institute of Fine Arts (Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes) in Mexico City. The impressive building dates from the mid-18th century and has an immense, tree-shaded courtyard. Several murals are exhibited, including one by David Alfaro Siqueiros. Admission is free.

Helene Kahn Tours conducts English-language walking tours of the city as well as guided excursions to such out-of-town points of interest as the Charco del Ingenio Botanical Garden and the Sanctuary of Atotonilco. Reservations are required; check the website for details or phone (415) 152-0849.

For information about local happenings, consult the weekly English-language newspaper *Atención San Miguel*, which is available at the public library (see attraction listing)

and the El Colibri bookstore, about 2 blocks east of the main plaza at Calle Sollano #30.

# Shopping

San Miguel is known for regionally produced, highquality handicrafts. Metalwork—masks, trays, lanterns, picture frames and decorative objects made of tin, copper, brass, bronze and wrought iron—and the work of local silversmiths is particularly worth seeking out. You'll also find pottery, weavings, sculpture, straw items, hand-loomed cambaya cloth (a material frequently used to make skirts), and folk and traditional art. The colonial furniture is some of the finest produced in Mexico.

Most craft and gift shops are open Mon.-Sat. 9-7 and close from 2-4 for the traditional siesta; a few may open briefly on Sunday. Many accept U.S. dollars and/or Master-Card and Visa, and some will pack and ship purchases.

The open-air City Market fills the plaza near the Church of San Felipe Neri, several blocks northeast of the main plaza, and usually spreads onto the surrounding streets. Livestock and fresh produce share space with inexpensive everyday items and souvenirs at the cheaper end of the price scale. The Crafts Market (Mercado de Artesanías) consists of vendor stalls in an alley off Calle Loreto, near the Quinta Loreto Hotel and the City Market.

Pricier boutiques are scattered throughout the historic downtown area. Casa Canal, on Calle Canal, specializes in hand-carved wooden furniture. Casa Maxwell, Calle Canal #14, has an array of Mexican and Latin American folk art. For a large selection of antiques, colonial art and home furnishings, browse through La Antigua Casa Canela, Calle Umaran #20.

Art galleries are concentrated around the main plaza, and exhibit openings are big social events. Two that showcase both regional and national talent are Galería San Miguel, Plaza Principal #14, and Galería Atenea, Calle Jesús #2.

Embark on a road trip to Galería Atotonilco. From downtown San Miguel, take Calzada de la Aurora (the northward extension of Calle Hidalgo), which becomes Mexico #51 heading to Dolores Hidalgo. Continue north about 8 kilometers (5 miles). At El Cortijo, just past the Escondido Spa, turn left in front of a small stone arch, then left again where the main road veers left. After approximately .65 kilometers (.4 miles), watch for two houses (one yellow and one white) next to each other. Turn right between them and follow the curving driveway to the red gallery building.

Located in a beautiful rural setting on the Río Laja, the gallery carries high-quality handicrafts and antiques from all over Mexico—ceramic jars, vases and platters, colorful baskets, hand-forged ironwork, country-style furniture. Folk art includes whimsical trees of life in different sizes,

hand-painted animal wood carvings from Oaxaca, papiermâché skeletons and retablos (small oil paintings of Catholic saints). There's also a nice selection of handwoven sarapes from villages in northern Mexico. The gallery is open by appointment only; phone (415) 185-2225 or (510) 295-4097 (from the United States).

# Dining, Nightlife and Events

Due to San Miguel's expat community there are numerous restaurants offering a wide range of cuisines. They also open and close regularly; check with the State Tourism Office for the current local favorites. The most expensive places are in the upscale hotels, where the dress code may require a sports coat for men. See the Lodgings & Restaurants section for AAA Diamond designated dining establishments.

You can sip fancy cocktails and dance to DJ-spun hip-hop at the Mint nightclub, located in the same building as the El Petit Four restaurant/bakery (Calle Mesones #99, near the main plaza). Mama Mia's, a bar and restaurant at Calle Umarán #8, has live salsa and jazz bands.

San Miguel celebrates a number of festivals throughout the year. Perhaps the biggest event is the Fiesta of the Archangel San Miguel (Fiesta de San Miguel Arcángel) on Sept. 29, which honors the town's patron saint. The festivities, which extend for several days, take place around the main plaza and along the adjoining streets and include parades, fireworks and regional dance performances.

Holy Week (Semana Santa) celebrations, which begin about 2 weeks before Easter Sunday, include a lavish procession on Good Friday and the burning of Judas effigies on Easter. The traditional and very popular Festival of San Antonio de Padua (Fiesta de San Antonio de Padua) is held on June 13; it features the Los Locos (Crazy Ones) parade, when people dress up in fanciful costumes and masks and parade through the streets to the accompaniment of live music.

The Chamber Music Festival (Festival de Música de Cámara) is held the first 2 weeks of August at the Bellas Artes Cultural Center. The International Festival of Jazz and Blues takes place in mid-November.

San Miguel's traditional *posadas*, with music, canticles and plays dramatizing Mary and Joseph's search for an inn, ring in the holiday season beginning Dec. 16. The State Tourism Office has information about these and other event happenings.

State Tourism Office: (Desarrollo Social del Municipio de San Miguel de Allende) is on Calle San Francisco, across from the n. side of El Jardín (the main plaza). Open Mon.-Fri. 8:30-8, Sat. 10-8, Sun. 10-5:30. **Phone:** (415) 152-0900.

CHURCH OF THE CONCEPTION (Iglesia de la Concepción) is about 2 blks. w. of the main plaza at calles Canal and Hernández Macías. It was begun in the mid-17th century, although the domed roof—one of the largest in Mexico—was not completed until 1891. While the exterior is worn, inside is a breathtaking *retablo* more than 30 feet tall, decorated with gilded wood and numerous statues. Also notable are the huge oil paintings in both transepts portraying events in the lives of Jesus and Mary. Time: Allow 30 minutes minimum. Phone: (415) 152-0148.

CHURCH OF SAN FRANCISCO is at the corner of Calle San Francisco and Calle Juárez, 2 blks. from the main plaza. Built in the late 18th century, it is thought to be the work of Eduardo Tresquerras, who contributed to the design of many churches in central Mexico. Construction was financed through donations from wealthy families and the proceeds from bullfights.

The intricate stone carvings gracing the exterior are a fine example of the ornate Churrigueresque style. The high-ceilinged interior contains statues, paintings and more carved stone. The church's shaded outdoor courtyard, complete with stone fountain, is a pleasant spot to rest your feet.

Correo, facing the s. side of the main plaza; street PARISH CHURCH (La Parroquía) is on Calle parking is limited. Soaring over the plaza, La Parroquía dominates the city. Originally built in the late 17th century in a plain Franciscan style, it was given an imposing facelift 2 centuries later by a local Indian artisan, Zeferino

Gutiérrez. With no formal training, he added the present facade of pink-hued sandstone, allegedly using postcard pictures of French Gothic cathedrals as his inspiration.

Inside are murals, vaulted ceilings, side chapels and statues of saints, including St. Michael the Archangel (the church's official name is Parroquía de San Miguel Arcángel). The tomb of Anastasio Bustamante, president of Mexico from 1832-33 and again from 1839-41, is open to the public on Nov. 2. The original bell, cast in 1732, begins ringing early in the morning to summon parishioners. Time: Allow 45 minutes minimum. Phone: (415) 152-4197.

SANCTUARY OF ATOTONILCO (Santuario de Atotonilco) is about 15 km (9 mi.) n. on Mex. 51, then about 3 km (1.9 mi.) s.w. off the highway in the village of Atotonilco. "El Santuario" minibuses make this trip, departing from the bus stop on Calle Puente Umarán (opposite the city market). The church's exterior is plain and worn, but inside is true beauty-walls and arched ceilings covered with writings, poems, paintings and frescoes, most in full color. The Chapel of the Rosario, dedicated to Our Lady of Guadalupe, has an entire wall adorned with goldframed stations of the cross surrounding a life-size statue of the saint.

Hiring a guide in San Miguel to show you around the church and explain its historical significance makes for a more rewarding experience. Time: Allow 30 minutes minimum.



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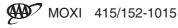


Please refer to pages 10-11 for Inspected Clean details.





Mexican Small Plates Casual Dining. Address: Nemesio Diez 11, Colonia Centro.



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## TLAQUEPAQUE, JALISCO

Note: For current information about safety/security issues in Tlaguepague, refer to the U.S. State Department website (travel.state.gov).

Tlaguepaque (tla-keh-PAH-keh), part of the Guadalajara metropolitan area, borders the southeastern side of the city. An important crafts center, it produces the distinctive, hand-painted Tlaquepaque pottery that is prized throughout Mexico. The fragile earthenware is decorated by hand. Many artisans still use the potter's wheel, and visitors can view the work in progress at some pottery shops. Tlaguepaque also is known for blown glass, textiles, jewelry, furniture, copperware and carved wood. The town is a tourist magnet and can get very crowded, but dedicated shoppers won't want to miss out on the huge selection of high-quality handicrafts.

The word "mariachi" seems to have originated in Tlaguepague. French soldiers garrisoned in the city in the mid-19th century noted that the strolling troubadours performed primarily at weddings, or *mariages*, hence the possible derivation of the term. Mariachi bands perform in the gazebo within Jardín Hidalgo, the main plaza (bounded by the streets Independencia, Guillermo Prieto, Morelos and Francisco I. Madero).

Browsing is easiest along pedestrian-only Calle Independencia. Many of the shops and galleries are housed in refurbished old mansions with thick stone walls and iron gates. Most of the larger shops accept U.S. dollars or payment by credit card, and will arrange to have purchases packed and shipped as well. Many are closed or open limited hours on Sunday. Under the circular roof of El Parián, a building in the middle of town, are many sidewalk cafes, pleasant spots to relax over a leisurely lunch while the shops close for afternoon siesta (usually between 2 and 4).

La Casa Canela, Independencia #258, has showrooms arranged around a lush garden patio. This tasteful shop offers Mexican furniture, papier-mâché artworks and antiques. Tierra Tlaquepaque, Independencia #156, offers wood sculpture, pottery and decorative objects. Sergio Bustamente's fanciful sculptures, known around the world, are featured at the Galería Sergio Bustamente, Calle Independencia #238.

Linea Turquesa (TUR) buses depart regularly for Tlaquepaque and Tonalá (see separate listing within this region) from downtown Guadalajara; the trip takes about half an hour. They carry only seated passengers; cheaper city buses carry standing passengers as well and are likely to be crowded. Tell the driver you want to get off at the stop nearest El Parián.

If driving, take Avenida Revolución off Calzada Independencia Sur, heading southeast away from downtown Guadalajara. This road becomes Boulevard Tlaquepaque as it heads into town. At the traffic circle, bear right onto Avenida Niños Héroes, which runs into Calle Independencia after a block.

**Tourist information office:** Calle Guillermo Prieto #80. just n. of the main plaza. Open Mon.-Fri. 9-3, Sat. 9-1. Phone: (33) 3635-5756.

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### TLAXCALA, TLAXCALA

Capital of the same-named state, Tlaxcala (tlas-KAHlah) is about 75 miles east of Mexico City. This amiable colonial town is off the tourist track, but it's one of Mexico's most picturesque places, and makes for a delightful day trip from Mexico City or Puebla.

Buildings downtown are painted in shades of sepia, deep red and orange. Plaza Constitución, the main square, has neatly trimmed trees, a bandstand and a burbling fountain presented to the city by King Philip III.

On the plaza's north side is the Government Palace (Palacio de Gobierno), with a brick exterior accented by ornately decorated windows and doorways. Inside are extravagantly colorful murals depicting agricultural life and the history of the Tlaxcaltec people, painted in the early 1960s by local artist Desiderio Hernández Xochitiotzin.

Also on the plaza is the baroque Palace of Justice (Palacio de Justicia), with neoclassic touches added in the 18th century. Inside the Parish Church of St. Joseph (Parroquía de San José), a peach-colored building, is the Chapel of St. Joseph (Capilla de San José), which has an arched ceiling with plaster ornamentation and impressive altarpieces.

Perhaps the finest examples of pre-Columbian artwork in all of Mexico are the mural paintings on view at the ruins of Cacaxtla (ca-CASHT-la). Discovered in 1975, they remain vividly colorful more than a thousand years after their execution. Archeological evidence suggests the city that once stood here reached a peak of development between A.D. 650 and 900, and was abandoned by the beginning of the 11th century.

Cacaxtla's earliest structures were a group of adobe edifices demolished over time and filled in to form a large platform. This process was repeated several times until the foundation reached its present height. Most of the structures seen today are vestiges dating from the latest period of construction. Ceremonial courtyards, tombs and enclosures were repeatedly reconfigured during the site's centuries of occupation.

About 45 kilometers (28 miles) southeast of Tlaxcala is La Malinche National Park. The park's dominant feature is La Malinche, an extinct volcano 14,632 feet high. At the park entrance is Malintzin, a vacation resort run by the Mexican Social Security Institute (IMSS) that offers lodgings, sports facilities and medical services in a wooded setting. Malintzin lies at a 9,840-foot elevation on the northern slopes of the mountain; from a marked exit on Mex. 136 between the towns of Apizaco and Huamantla (the sign reads "Centro Vacacional Malintzi"), a road ascends 14 kilometers (9 miles) to the retreat.

Tlaxcala State Tourism Office (Secretaría de Turismo): at the intersection of avenidas Benito Juárez and Lardizábal (behind the Government Palace). The staff speaks English. Open Mon.-Fri. 9-7, Sat.-Sun. 10-6. Phone: 01 (800) 509-6557 (toll-free long distance within Mexico).

CACAXTLA RUINS are about 17 km (12 mi.) southwest of Tlaxcala. To reach them by car from the center of town, take the road to Nativitas (follow signs) and then watch for the sign about 1.5 km (1 mi.) w. of that town indicating the direction to Cacaxtla and the nearby village of San Miguel del Milagro. The hillside entrance to the site is about a 1-mi. walk from the parking lot. From the Mexico City-Puebla toll road (Mex. 150-D), take the San Martín Texmelucan exit and proceed e. toward Nativitas about 6 km (4 mi.), following signs.

Climb the stairs to reach the Gran Plaza, a broad platform protected by a huge metal roof. In addition to providing rain and sun protection, boardwalks beneath this overhead run right up to the various murals and stone carvings. The largest and most dramatic of the murals is the mythological Mural of the Battle, painted between A.D. 650 and 700. It depicts two groups of warriors—one outfitted in birdlike plumage and feather headdresses, the other cloaked in the skins of jaguars. The colors—rich blues, reds, yellows and browns—and the depth of detail are startling.

Note: The ticket window is about 100 feet inside the ruins complex, which is open per the schedule even if the gate happens to be closed. **Time:** Allow 3 hours minimum. Phone: (246) 416-0000.

Xochitécatl is about a 2 km (1.2 mi.) walk from Cacaxtla on the other side of a small valley. It was not uncovered until 1994. The large, open-air site consists of three pyramids and the base of a fourth. The Pirámide de la Espiral, named for its circular shape, is thought to have been used for astronomical explorations or built in dedication to Ehecatl, the god of wind. The Pyramid of the Flowers (Pirámide de las Flores), also constructed of rounded stones, has an exceptionally wide base. Phone: (246) 416-0000.

SANCTUARY OF THE VIRGIN OF OCOTLAN (Santuario de la Virgen de Ocotlán) sits atop a high hill about a mile e. of Tlaxcala's town center, in the small hamlet of Ocotlán. It commemorates the supposed appearance of the Virgin of Guadalupe to the Indian Juan Diego Bernardino at this site in 1541. The church is surrounded by a large plaza, with a guiet, shady park across the street. The exterior is quite interesting: an intricately detailed front facade of white stucco, dominated by a large, fluted shell-like design and twin towers made from local cantera stone.

The interior is an explosion of gilded, carved wood ornamentation, with a large altar and several side sconces with life-size statues of saints. The octagonal Dressing Room (Camarín), a chamber where the Virgin's robes were said to be changed, is graced with more carvings of saints and angels. Life's hard realities are underscored by signs on the church's entry door that advertise low-cost services for the poor.

You can hike to the sanctuary from town or take an inexpensive *colectivo* (minivan) designated "Ocotlán"; the driver will stop at the front steps and wait while you visit.

## **TULA, HIDALGO**

Tula (TOO-lah), or officially Tula de Allende, was founded by Franciscans in the early 16th century; their fortress-like church, which also dates from that time, still stands. Typical of smaller Mexican towns, it has a nontouristy look and a quiet central plaza bordered with taco stands. Archeologists long believed that the remains of the Toltec capital of Tollan, which means "metropolis" or "large city," were somewhere in this region; however, the exact whereabouts remained a mystery until the Tula ruins were determined to be the site in 1938.

Tula's dominance as a major city in pre-Hispanic Mexico was relatively brief—from about A.D. 950 to 1174, when the Chichimecs, forerunners of the Aztecs, attacked, sacked and burned it. The sculptural figure known as Chac Mool, first found at this site, has become an international artistic symbol of Mesoamerican culture. But the reclining figure—holding a vessel that presumably received still-beating hearts torn from victims' chests during sacrificial ceremonies—underscores the violent nature of Toltec culture.

TULA RUINS are about 32 km (20 mi.) off Mex. 57-D (the toll highway to Querétaro) n. through the center of Tula, then 4 km (2.5 mi.) n.w. to the site, following signs. Taxis departing from Tula's main plaza can drop visitors off at the ruins. They constitute what is left of the capital and chief ceremonial center of the Toltecs. The focal point of the ruins is the five-tiered pyramid with a tongue-twisting name, the Temple of Tlahuizcalpantecuitli (Lord of the House of the Morning Star Venus). It dominates the north side of a plaza flanked by colonnaded buildings.

On top of the pyramid stand colossal figures known as the Atlantes (one is a replica). They once supported the roof of a temple that stood atop the pyramid. Each Atlantean is swaddled in a loincloth, its chest protected by stylized butterfly breastplates and its back by shields in the shape of the sun. The figures also sport headgear. This pyramid as well as several others can be climbed, but their steepness makes descending more difficult than ascending.

The museum near the entrance houses professional displays of artifacts found at the site, including huge sandal-clad feet carved from solid rock. Vendors hawking artifact replicas line the path from the museum to the ruins.

The site is not shaded; wear a hat and bring water. **Time:** Allow 1 hour minimum.

# URUAPAN, MICHOACÁN

Travel Advisory: We do not recommend travel to the state of Michoacan due to the U.S. Department of State's "Do Not Travel" warning. The acute level of crime and violence in this area prohibits AAA inspections.

Uruapan (oo-roo-AH-pahn) means "place where the flowers bloom," and the lush vegetation seen throughout the city is a testament to the warm climate (it is nearly 2,000 feet lower in elevation than nearby Pátzcuaro). Orange groves and plantations growing coffee, bananas and especially avocados flourish in the fertile farmland that surrounds the city. Uruapan also is known for hand-painted lacquerware carved from cedar and other native woods.

Uruapan is located in a region that is experiencing ongoing drug cartel violence, and the city has a very visible police and military presence.

**Michoacán State Tourism Office (Delegación de Turismo):** Calle Independencia #18, about 2 blks. northwest of the main plaza. Open Mon.-Sat. 9-2 and 4-7. **Phone:** (452) 524-7199.

# ZACATECAS, ZACATECAS

Travel Advisory: We do not recommend travel to the state of Zacatecas due to the U.S. Department of State's "Do Not Travel" warning. The acute level of crime and violence in this area prohibits AAA Inspections.

Zacatecas (sah-kah-TEH-kahs), capital of the state of the same name, is built in a ravine on the slopes of Cerro de la Bufa, a mountain 8,748 feet high. This centuries-old mining settlement was conquered by the Spaniards in 1548; 40 years later it was bestowed the title of "The Very Noble and Loyal City of Our Lady of the Zacatecas" because of the vast quantities of silver shipped from the region to Spain. Although surrounded by agricultural and cattle-raising lands, Zacatecas continues to be a center

for silver mining. The largest mine in the region is 200year-old El Bote, which is still in operation.

Elaborate old mansions, an aqueduct and stone steps connecting steeply inclined flagstone streets lend Zacatecas a decidedly medieval atmosphere; the historic city center was designated a World Heritage Site by UNESCO in 1993. The beautiful baroque buildings also attest to the great wealth that was generated by the mines.

A wide, divided avenue 5 kilometers (3 miles) long leads east from downtown to the suburb of Guadalupe, the site of an early 18th-century convent. It once served as a base for Franciscan missions established to the north of Mexico in what is now the southwestern United States. The town is noted for its colonial architecture in addition to marquetry (inlaid woodwork) and wool *sarapes* with portraits woven into their designs. Trancoso, 22 kilometers (14 miles) east of Zacatecas off Mex. 45/49, has one of the most elegant and best preserved old haciendas in Mexico.

In the barrio of Bracho, on the north side of the loop road encircling the city, the Festival of La Morisma is celebrated the last week in August. The highlight is a spectacular re-enactment of a 3-day battle that took place between Moors and Christians in Spain, carried out by thousands of locals dressed in colorful costumes. Prior to the mock battle the participants march in a huge morning parade accompanied by bands of musicians.

The year's biggest event is the Zacatecas National Fair (Feria Nacional Zacatecas), which takes place over 2 weeks from early through mid-September. A celebration of Zacatecan culture, it offers theatrical performances and traditional dances that honor indigenous ancestry as well as impromptu band performances and concerts featuring well-known Mexican pop music stars. There's also a midway with carnival rides for kids and plenty of booths selling regional food and beverages.

Zacatecas State Tourism Office (Secretaría de Turismo del Estado de Zacatecas): downtown at Calle Hidalgo #403 (second floor). Open Mon.-Fri. 8-8, Sat.-Sun. 10-6.

**Phone:** (492) 922-6751, or 01 (800) 712-4078 (toll-free long distance within Mexico).

**EL EDÉN MINE** (Mina el Edén) can be reached by car from Mex. 54; when entering the city, follow signs to downtown (Centro), then signs to "Mina el Edén." The mine is just n. on Calle Dovali Jamie from the intersection with Av. Torreón; a nearby landmark is the IMSS Social Security Hospital (Seguro Social Hospital). First operated in the 16th century, El Edén produced great quantities of silver, copper and zinc during its most active period.

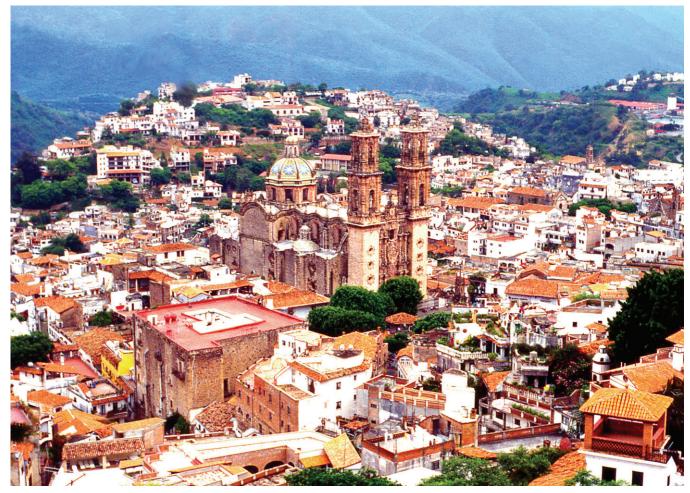
A small powered train takes visitors through several of the mine's tunnels before stopping at a small museum with a display of rocks and minerals from around the world. Visitors then proceed on foot while a tour guide provides information about mining processes, the mine's history and the living conditions of the original Indian miners.

Most tours are in Spanish; visitors may want to phone ahead to set up a tour with an English-speaking guide. **Time:** Allow 1 hour minimum. **Phone:** (492) 922-3002.

RAFAEL CORONEL MUSEUM (Museo Rafael Coronel) is n. of the cathedral via Calle Abasolo to Calle San Francisco. It is housed in the 18th-century Convento de San Francisco, abandoned as a convent in 1857. The building's exterior is a mellowed pink, and flowering plants fill the gardens in the interior courtyard.

On display in large, high-ceilinged galleries is an amazing collection of several thousand masks from all over Mexico, donated by Rafael Coronel, younger brother of Pedro. They depict saints as well as grotesque-looking, devilish figures, *conquistadores* and bizarrely imaginative animals. Entirely handmade and decorated with everything from human hair and glitter to steel wool and bones, the masks are a remarkable testament to Mexican artistic ingenuity. There also are impressive dioramas of puppets engaged in such activities as warfare, a bullfight and a wedding, all created by a family of puppet makers from Huamantla, Tlaxcala. **Phone:** (492) 922-8116.





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# **Southern Mexico**

exico's poorest region economically is among its richest in cultural traditions. Many people who live in the states of Oaxaca and Chiapas are descended from the Zapotec, Mixtec and Mayan civilizations that flourished hundreds of years before the Spanish conquest of Mexico. The Maya left behind the ruins of Palengue, Bonampak, Yaxchilan and Tonina, all in Chiapas.

The Zapotecs settled in the Valley of Oaxaca and created the ceremonial center of Monte Albán, which eluded discovery by Spanish *conquistadores*. Much more recently Chiapas, Mexico's southernmost state, made international

headlines with the 1994 emergence of the Zapatista National Liberation Army, a guerrilla movement that demanded greater economic opportunities for the region's Indians, or *indígenas*.

Oaxaca is a quintessential Mexican destination; it offers excellent museums, beautiful churches, a vibrant central plaza and Indian markets overflowing with native handicrafts. The distinctive regional cuisine includes everything from subtly spiced *mole* sauces to *panuchos*, fried corn tortillas topped with pork and onions.

Veracruz has the languid ambience of a tropical port (Mexico's oldest and largest) as well as the energy provided



by lively music, folk dances and a jolt of *café con leche*. The strong black coffee, laced with hot milk, can be enjoyed at one of the city's many sidewalk cafes. Other Veracruzan specialties are cigars and the *quexquémetl*, a capelike garment decorated with multicolored embroidery.

Little-visited Jalapa is a blend of old and new. Situated on the slopes of Macuiltépetl, a large, tiered hill, the town was a Spanish stronghold and important stagecoach stop between Veracruz and Mexico City. The colonists who followed in the wake of Hernando Cortés almost certainly found the higher altitude and cooler climate a welcome respite from steamy Veracruz, as well as an environment suitable for the cultivation of coffee and fruit trees.

The picturesque old silver-mining town of Taxco is a popular tourist stop between Mexico City and Acapulco. Sprawled over a rugged hillside in the heart of the Sierra Madre, it hasn't changed that much in outward appearance since the 18th century. The Mexican government prohibits the building of modern structures; older ones—in various stages of preservation—proliferate, along with whitewashed houses, red-tiled roofs and cobblestoned streets.

It is recommended that travelers check on current conditions in the state of Guerrero. The most potentially dangerous areas are the mountainous, remote interior and undeveloped sections of the Pacific coast. Travel is advised only during daylight hours on toll highway Mex. 95D between Mexico City and Acapulco.

AAA recommends that travelers consult online U.S. State Department travel advisories when planning traveling abroad. Find this information at travel.state.gov/content/passports/en/country/mexico.html.

# JALAPA, VERACRUZ

**Note:** For current information about safety/security issues in Jalapa, refer to the U.S. State Department website (travel.state.gov).

Capital of the state of Veracruz and home to nearly 400,000 people, Jalapa (hah-LAH-pah, but spelled Xalapa in Mexico) doesn't feel like a big city. The natural setting is breathtaking—the black volcanic peaks of the Sierra Madre Oriental rise in the distance, towered over by Pico de Orizaba, Mexico's tallest mountain. Practically every corner offers a vista of the surrounding mountainous terrain.

Jalapa's colonial legacy is evident in the structures flanking older, cobblestone avenues; their red-tiled roofs, wrought-iron balconies, carved wooden doors and window grilles are unmistakably Spanish. Shops and homes are painted in vibrant shades of white, green and deep red. The streets are steep and curving, and also change names and directions frequently; a good city map is an effective

navigational aid. Taxis and local buses provide inexpensive transportation to points within the city center.

Begin a morning stroll of downtown Jalapa at the Café la Parroquía, on Calle Zaragoza near the south side of the Government Palace (Palacio de Gobierno). A local gathering place, it has an old-fashioned '50s look and attracts everyone from university professors to families. As in Veracruz, a favorite morning beverage is a *lechero*, a tall glass of strong espresso to which hot milk is added. Tapping your glass with a spoon signals the waiter, who pours the milk from a steaming kettle.

At the corner of calles Enríquez and Revolución, just north of the Government Palace, stands the city's 18th-century Cathedral. The plain white facade is accented by Moorish-style arches and a bell tower clock transported from London. The religious paintings inside are worth a look, as is the sloping floor.

The *chipichipi*, a light but persistent winter rain, and evening mists in summer contribute to Jalapa's reputation as the "flower garden of Mexico." The warmth and moisture create a natural greenhouse effect, and the city is filled with roses, bougainvillea and pine trees. Treeshaded Juárez Park (Parque Juárez), across Calle Enríquez from the City Hall (Palacio Municipal), is representative of the prevailing lushness. White wrought-iron benches are scattered among pruned hedges and well-tended flower beds at this park, which also is the city's central plaza.

The University of Veracruz gives Jalapa a cultural side. The Agora Arts Center, just off Juárez Park, is a hangout for students and artists and has extensive events listings. The State Theater (Teatro del Estado) on Ignacio de la Llave hosts performances by the ballet and the symphony. On Sept. 30, the Day of St. Jerome, the streets are garlanded with flowers and candlelight processions are held.

A few blocks south of Juárez Park on attractively landscaped lakeside grounds is the state-run Casa de Artesanías, where packaged coffee beans and handicrafts by Veracruzan artists are for sale. The indoor market on Calle Altamirano, about 2 blocks north of Juárez Park, is a colorful hodgepodge of assorted trinkets, containers of bubbling *mole* sauces and heaps of dried beans and chiles.

Street vendors frequent Callejón Diamante, a steep little alley off Calle Juan de La Luz Enríquez (a block or so east of Juárez Park). Casual restaurants specialize in regional fare; La Sopa serves a filling *comida corrida* (fixed-price lunch).

Macuiltépetl Park (Parque Macuiltépetl), north of downtown, is an ecological preserve that showcases indigenous flora and fauna. The winding paths offer a bracing climb up one of Jalapa's hillsides, and the views are outstanding.

## **Practicalities**

The nearest international airport is in Veracruz. From Veracruz, Jalapa is about a 2-hour drive north on Mex. 180 to the town of Cardel, then east on Mex. 140 past numerous coffee plantations.

The central bus station (CAXA) is on Avenida 20 de Noviembre, about a mile east of the downtown area. Here you can make first-class bus connections, arrange for a taxi into town (an otherwise hilly walk) and even grab a bite to eat. It also has a tourist information booth that is open daily. First-class bus service is offered by Autobuses del Oriente (ADO).

Veracruz State Tourism Office (Subsecretaría de Turismo): Blvd. Cristóbal Colón #5 in the Torre Animas building, about 3 kilometers (1.9 miles) east of downtown. Phone: 01 (800) 712-6666 (toll-free long distance within Mexico).

MUSEUM OF ANTHROPOLOGY (Museo de Antropología de Xalapa) is n.w. of downtown on Av. Xalapa, between avs. Acueducto and 10 de Mayo. It houses a superb collection of artifacts encompassing most of Mexico's gulf coast Indian groups, with an emphasis on the Olmec, Totonac and Huastec cultures. Contrasting vividly with the antiquity of the exhibits is the ultramodern museum building, which incorporates a series of tropically landscaped outdoor patios.

A massive Olmec head is stationed at the museum entrance; several other heads, the largest almost 9 feet tall, are on display in outdoor gardens and indoor galleries. Additional highlights include dramatically lifelike ceramic statues of women wearing belts in the form of writhing serpents; a carved figure in green stone holding an infant with jaguar-like facial features that are characteristically Olmec; and beautifully crafted jade and bone jewelry. The carefully organized displays are augmented by maps that note excavation sites and show where the civilizations flourished.

Information about the exhibits is presented in Spanish only, but headphone audio guides are available in English. **Time:** Allow 2 hours minimum. **Phone:** (228) 815-0920.

# **Nearby Destinations**

Formal plantings, an arboretum and a palm collection make up Clavijero Botanical Gardens, about 3 kilometers (1.5 miles) south of downtown via the road to Coatepec. En route are views of coffee and banana plantations. Coatepec, a colonial town about 8 kilometers (5 miles) south of Jalapa, is known for the raising of ornamental plants, chiefly orchids. The main plaza is surrounded by

small shops selling coffee beans and *heladerías* (ice cream parlors) dishing up exotic flavors.

About 11 kilometers (7 miles) past Coatepec is Xico (HEE-coh), a village where sacks of coffee beans are one of the most common sights. Nearby Texolo Waterfall (Cascada de Texolo) has been put to good scenic use in such films as "Romancing the Stone" and parts of the Harrison Ford espionage adventure "A Clear and Present Danger." The falls cascade into a gorge surrounded by lush greenery. A restaurant is at the site, and pathways allow visitors to observe the falls from different vantage points. Local buses to Coatepec and Xico depart from Jalapa's central bus station.

### OAXACA, OAXACA

Oaxaca (wa-HAH-ka), situated in a high valley surrounded by the towering summits of the Sierra Madre del Sur, is one of Mexico's most culturally rewarding destinations. Indian traditions and heritage have remained largely intact in both the state of Oaxaca and in neighboring Chiapas, resulting in a rich and diverse legacy of handicrafts, ethnic celebrations and distinctive cookery. Today descendants of the ancient Zapotec and Mixtec peoples live in numerous rural villages scattered throughout the valley. Regional dialects abound, and for many Oaxaqueños Spanish is a second language.

This strong cultural identity has made Oaxaca one of Mexico's leading art centers. And certainly the city's setting would inspire many an artist. Older buildings are constructed from a volcanic stone that takes on a mellow golden tone in the late afternoon sun. Others are painted bright shades of turquoise and pink. Bougainvillea and roses tumble over walls, scarlet geraniums spill out of huge clay pots, and when the jacaranda trees are in bloom they form masses of purple. Completing this colorful palette is the sky, which is usually an azure blue.

Be sure to sample the local cuisine. Oaxaca is known in particular for *mole*, a sauce that incorporates a number of spices. There are seven varieties, with only *mole negro* employing the chocolate that also turns up in the *mole poblano* sauce of Puebla.

Other Oaxacan specialties include tamales oaxaqueños, a mixture of ground corn (masa), shredded chicken and mole wrapped in a banana leaf and then steamed; tlayudas, crispy, dinner plate-sized corn tortillas topped with a wash of refried beans, meat, lettuce or cabbage, cheese and avocado slices; picadillo, spicy shredded pork; quesillo, a stringy, mildly flavored white cheese; and corn on the cob basted with lime juice and dusted with chile powder, a favorite street snack. Feeling

adventurous? Try chapulines (fried grasshoppers) with a squeeze of lime and a dash of chili powder or garlic; they're sold in the food markets and by vendors at Plaza Principal, the city's bustling main square.

#### **Practicalities**

Oaxaca's Xoxocotlán International Airport is about 8 kilometers (5 miles) south of the city off Mex. 175. United offers direct flights from the United States. Other airlines providing service to the airport include Aeroméxico Connect, American and Volaris. For additional information about airlines see Arriving by Air, page p. 28.

Transportes Terrestres colectivo (shared taxi) and private taxi service between the airport and downtown hotels is easily arranged. Private taxi fare averages 250 pesos. Colectivos are cheaper, about 75 pesos per person.

It takes between 5 and 6 hours to drive from downtown Mexico City to Oaxaca via well-signed toll roads Mex. 150-D and Mex. 135-D. After bypassing Puebla and east of the town of Acatzingo, watch for the junction with Mex. 135-D at the town of Cuachopalan. Mex. 135-D runs south, skirting the cities of Tehuacán and Nochixtlán en route to Oaxaca.

First-class service between Mexico City and Oaxaca is offered by the ADO bus line. ADO buses depart from Mexico City's Terminal de Autobuses de Pasajeros de Oriente (TAPO), located at Calzada Ignacio Zaragoza #200, near Benito Juárez International Airport. In Oaxaca the ADO bus station is at the corner of Calzada Niños Héroes de Chapultepec (Mex. 190) and Avenida 5 de Mayo, about a mile northeast of the *Zócalo* (Plaza Principal).

Local buses depart from the second-class bus station (about eight blocks west of the *Zócalo* via Avenida Valerio Trujano). They're an economical way to travel to the Monte Albán archeological ruins and nearby Indian villages, although these trips can be excruciatingly slow along the narrow, winding mountain roads. For additional information about buses see Bus Service, page p. 36.

Taxis are another way to get around town, and the fare to nearby destinations can be shared among several riders; negotiate the rate before you set out. Fares within the city center average about \$4 (U.S.). Taxis line up around Plaza Principal.

Personal safety in Oaxaca means using common sense—precautions such as keeping your car in a lot overnight rather than parking it on the street, storing all valuables out of sight, and staying alert in public places where smooth professional pickpockets operate, like markets and bus stations. Stick to established tourist areas, and avoid driving after dark.

Temperatures are mild to warm throughout the year, averaging in the 70s or 80s during the day and the 50s or 60s at night. May is the hottest month and the height of the dry season; the rainy season is from June through September. At this tropical latitude the sun can be quite strong; take the necessary precautions if you'll be outside all day. Sturdy, comfortable walking shoes also come in handy for exploring the ruins and trekking around the village markets. Avoid wearing skimpy or revealing clothing inside churches.

## Special Events

Oaxaca's festivals draw big crowds, so hotel space should be booked well in advance for the Easter holiday and in July. November and December. The Guelaguetza Festival is a centuries-old festival celebrated throughout the state. Community troupes present their regional costumes, dances, songs and music in a specially designed, open-air theater (Auditorio Guelaguetza) built into the side of Cerro del Fortín, a hill in the northern part of the city. To reach the site, take Calzada Madero north to the Mex. 190 junction, then go east on Mex. 190 about 1.6 kilometers (1 mile).

There are numerous Oaxacan folk dance and musical performances, and participating singers, dancers and musicians throw *quelaquetzas* (gifts) to spectators. An evening show presents the legend of Princess Donají, which includes staged re-enactments of battles between Zapotec and Mixtec warriors. Even if you have tickets, arrive early—at least by 8 a.m.—for the best seats. Bring water, and wear a hat or appropriate headgear for sun protection.

Performances are given on the two successive Mondays following July 16. (In years when July 18—the anniversary of Benito Juárez's death-falls on a Monday, the dates are July 25 and Aug. 1.) Check in advance with a travel counselor, the Oaxaca State Tourism Office or your hotel for the exact dates. Tickets, necessary for the main performances, should be reserved no later than May, preferably through a travel agent; confirm the exact festival dates when you make your reservations.

Note: The escaleras (stairs) ascending Cerro del Fortín to the Nundehui Planetarium and Observatory offer panoramic views, and the hill is a popular hiking spot for both locals and visitors. However, foreigners are often held up and robbed, sometimes at knifepoint. Visit this area only during daylight hours (preferably morning), and go with a group if possible.

Holy Week, beginning the Friday before Easter Sunday, brings parades and communion services, and local churches sponsor fairs, concerts and other activities. Oaxaca celebrates the Day of the Dead (Día de Los Muertos) Oct. 31 and Nov. 1 and 2. The markets are ablaze with marigolds and sell all manner of offerings with which to decorate altars built to honor the deceased.

The Fiesta of the Virgen de la Soledad in mid-December is a Christmas season highlight and honors the city's patron saint with processions, fireworks, floats and dances. Dec. 23 marks the Night of the Radishes. The main plaza is filled with booths displaying radishes carved into all sorts of fanciful shapes. Fried radish cakes topped with molasses are served in clay dishes, and after finishing the treat it's customary to fling your dish to the ground so it breaks. The following night a procession of floats parades through the city center.

# **Shopping**

Oaxaca's markets are among Mexico's most fascinating, with head-turning displays of crafts, foodstuffs, household products and curios. If you don't mind the crowds and noise, Saturdays provide the biggest spectacle, drawing Indians who come for miles around to buy and sell. Arrive unburdened so you can maintain your bearings amid the jostling, and be prepared to bargain. A standard opening tactic is offering to pay half the selling price for any item.

Look for leather goods, hand-loomed cottons, jewelry, carved idols and black pottery from the village of San Bartolo Coyotepec. Teotitlán and Ocotlán are weaving and pottery centers, respectively. Carved, brightly painted wooden animals with whimsical or surreal expressions are another specialty. Gold, silver and jade jewelry is often a reproduction of actual pieces found at Monte Albán or designed in a similar style.

The enormous Abastos Market (Mercado de Abastos), southwest of downtown off the Periférico, the loop road that encircles the city, is one of Oaxaca's busiest. It's open daily but is busiest on Saturday, when locals and residents of surrounding villages convene to display their merchandise in a huge warehouse and across blocks of open-air lots and canopied stalls.

This market is packed with such items as shawls, embroidered blouses, leather goods, pottery, woven baskets, rugs, toys, religious ornaments, bird cages, carved and painted wooden animals and woven baskets. The air is filled with the smells of incense, chocolate and tortillas. Abastos also is a produce and livestock market, and there are piles of dried chiles in a rainbow of colors, mounds of garlic bulbs, herbs, unfamiliar vegetables and tropical fruits, along with goats, turkeys and chickens.

Two blocks southwest of Plaza Principal is the older, indoor Benito Juárez Market, again busiest on Saturday. This is primarily a produce market, but you'll also find cheeses, jars filled with *mole* sauces, locally made honey, bags of cacao beans, flowers and household goods. There are numerous food stalls here as well. Use appropriate caution when deciding whether or not to sample snacks; if you can see something being cooked it's usually safe to eat.

Stalls along Calle 20 de Noviembre sell clothing items like coarse-weave woolen sweaters, shawls and capes as well as elaborately embroidered *huipiles* (blouses). In the next block south is the Mercado 20 de Noviembre, where shoppers browse for sandals, straw hats, hammocks, tin ornaments, small pottery jars and animal, bird and angel figurines that hang in strings from the stall awnings. Other merchants specialize in highly polished Oaxacan cutlery—swords, sabers, knives and letter openers.

The Handicrafts Market (Mercado de Artesanías), 4 blocks southwest of Plaza Principal at the corner of calles J.P. García and Zaragoza, offers crafts, pottery and leather goods and also features native textiles. Artisans can be observed as they weave rugs, wall hangings and dresses on simple looms. It's open daily.

If you don't relish the back-and-forth of haggling, focus on the fixed-price stores. The government-run Oaxacan Institute of Artisans (Instituto Oaxaqueño del las Artesanías), Calle García Vigil #809, sells Oaxacan black pottery, rugs and textiles. The store has an English-speaking staff and can ship purchases; phone (951) 514-0861. The Galería Arte de Oaxaca, 3 blocks north and 1 block east of Plaza Principal at Calle Murguía #105, is a gallery featuring the work of noted Oaxacan painters and sculptors.

Between the main plaza and the Church of Santo Domingo Calle M. Alcalá is a pedestrian boulevard lined with high-quality shops. La Mano Mágica, Calle M. Alcalá #203, is a combination art gallery and crafts shop. It's known for finely woven rugs, particularly those by Teotitlán weaver Arnulfo Mendoza, and lovely pieces of regional folk art.

If you'd like to support local artisans, visit MARO (Mujeres Artesanas de las Regiones de Oaxaca), Av. 5 de Mayo #204 between Morelos and Murguía. This cooperative benefiting women in the villages of the Oaxaca Valley offers a variety of handicrafts, including Atzompa and Coyotepec pottery, stamped tinware, leather bags, sandals, belts and toys; phone (951) 516-0670.

Established shops and stores can usually arrange to ship your purchases back home. This is not the case with items purchased at the markets or from village craftspeople, however; always try to obtain a written receipt.

Excursions to area villages can be as rewarding as shopping in the city. The second-class bus station (see Practicalities) provides service to most of the villages; another option is to take an inexpensive taxi from a lot near the Abastos Market. Taxis serve the local population as

well and fill up quickly in the morning; a per-person rate is charged. A more convenient way to visit the markets is to hire a private car and driver who will provide transportation and also wait while you shop. Local tour companies offer this service; check with the State Tourism Office for more information.

Tianguis (open-air markets) take place on different days. Green-glazed pottery, including bowls from which breasts or lilies whimsically sprout, is the specialty at Atzompa, about 6 kilometers (4 miles) northwest of Oaxaca on Mex. 190. Also look for clay dolls. Market day here is Tuesday. A variety of cheeses and mole sauces can be purchased at the Wednesday market at San Pablo Etla, 14 kilometers (9 miles) northwest on Mex. 190. Thursday's market at Ejutla, 61 kilometers (38 miles) south on Mex. 175, is agriculturally oriented as well.

Zaachila, about 18 kilometers (11 miles) southwest on the road to Cuilapan, also has a Thursday market that does not target tourists but is interesting for its produce and livestock displays and snapshot of Mexican rural life. The raucous Friday market at Ocotlán, about 40 kilometers (25 miles) south on Mex. 175, is perhaps the busiest outside of Oaxaca. Rebozos (scarves or shawl-like garments), produce, leather goods, cutlery and whimsical ceramic figurines of women are among the many items for sale.

Other towns are known for a particular craft in which the entire populace seems to be involved. Arrazola, a tiny village southwest of Oaxaca near the ruins of Monte Albán, is noted for carvers who fashion fanciful wooden creatures painted in vivid colors. Second-class buses travel to Arrazola, and local youngsters will take you to the artisans' homes for a small tip.

San Bartolo Coyotepec, about 16 kilometers (10 miles) south of Oaxaca on Mex. 175, is the source of the distinctive black pottery sold in many Oaxaca shops. There are frequent organized bus tours to this village. Items can be purchased at the local factory, in shops around the village plaza or from the potters' homes. Friday is market day.

The village of Guelatao, 63 kilometers (39 miles) north on Mex. 175, has historical significance: It is the birthplace of Mexican president Benito Juárez. Guelatao's monument-studded plaza honors this native son, and lively celebrations are held on his birthday, Mar. 21. The journey to Guelatao offers impressively scenic mountain views at an elevation of around 7,000 feet. To fully enjoy the trip, take a bus; only motorists with nerves of steel should attempt to negotiate the roadway's serpentine bends and potholes.

Oaxaca State Tourism Office (Secretaría de Desarrollo **Turístico):** downtown at Calle Murguía #206 (between Reforma and 5 de Mayo). Mon.-Sat. 8-8. **Phone:** (951) 516-0123.

BASILICA OF OUR LADY OF SOLITUDE (Basilica de Nuestra Señora de la Soledad) is at Av. Independencia #107 (at Calle Victoria), 5 blks. w. of the Zócalo. This massive 17th-century structure, actually a complex of several buildings and a garden, has a richly carved exterior. The basilica is dedicated to the Virgin of Solitude (Virgen de la Soledad). A statue of the Virgin, Oaxaca's patron saint, is displayed above the altar, draped in jewelencrusted black velvet.

The interior is an extravagant showcase of baroque ornamentation. A museum to the rear of the church displays a replica of the Virgin statue. It also contains glass panels depicting the legend of her arrival in the city and an enormous assemblage of gifts (primarily miniature glass figurines) sent in tribute. Exhibit information is in Spanish.

CHURCH OF SANTO DOMINGO (Templo de Santo Domingo de Guzmán) is 6 blks. n. of the Santo Domingo de Guzmán) is 6 blks. n. of the Zócalo at calles Gurrión, Macedonio Alcalá, Berriozábal and Reforma. Founded by the Dominicans in the mid-16th century, it took about a century to complete. Even in a city (and country) of impressive churches, Santo Domingo has a well-deserved reputation as one of the most beautifully ornate. Every square inch of the interior walls and ceilings is covered with extravagant gold leaf, polychrome reliefs and plaster statues. Try to visit in the afternoon, when sunlight pouring through the stained-glass window casts everything in a golden glow.

One particularly noteworthy decoration, on the ceiling under the raised choir loft near the entrance, depicts crowned heads appearing on the branches of the family tree of Santo Domingo de Guzmán, founder of the Dominican order. The adjoining monastery houses the Santo Domingo Cultural Center (see attraction listing). Time: Allow 1 hour minimum. **Phone:** (951) 516-3720. **GT** 

DAINZU RUINS are about 24 km (15 mi.) s.e. of Oaxaca on a paved road off Mex. 190, on the way to Mitla; watch for the signed turn-off. Believed to be one of the final evidences of Olmec civilization in the Oaxaca region, their zenith was from around 600 B.C. to A.D. 200, before the better-known Monte Albán. A pyramidal structure (Edificio A) and a partially restored ball court can be seen, along with artwork portraying ball players and carvings of jaguars, rabbits and dancers.

Underground connecting tunnels can be explored, but they are dark, claustrophobic and have steep stairs. Time: Allow 1 hour minimum. GT

MONTE ALBÁN RUINS are about 10 km (6 mi.) s.w. of Oaxaca; if driving, take Calle Trujano w. out of town across the Río Atoyac; it becomes the narrow,

winding road to the ruins. One of Mexico's greatest pre-Columbian sites, Monte Albán presides over the valley of Oaxaca from a mountaintop location. This major religious center was built by the Zapotecs around 600 B.C. atop a summit that was deliberately flattened. At its height around A.D. 300, Monte Albán supported 40,000 inhabitants. The city was taken over in the 10th century by the Mixtecs, who were in turn conquered by the Aztecs, and fell into ruin around the time of the Spanish conquest.

The site's focal point is the Great Plaza, a grassy area about 970 feet long and 650 feet wide, bounded by four large ceremonial platforms. It was leveled by hewing away rock outcroppings. All of the buildings are aligned on a precise north-south axis except for one, an observatory believed to be placed in relation to the stars rather than to compass directions. Many of the structures are roped off.

An I-shaped ball court dominates one corner of the plaza. The Temple of the Dancers (danzantes), on the west side of the plaza, is the oldest building at the site and is named for the elaborate figures carved into its stone slabs. They were first thought to be dancers but may be representations of the diseased or cadavers used for study in a school of medicine.

Some 170 subterranean tombs are scattered throughout the ruins. These contain numerous slab paintings, glyphs, frescoes and stone carvings. Tombs 104 and 105 can be entered by climbing down a ladder, but aren't always open. In 1932, Tomb 7 (near the site entrance) yielded a priceless collection of items, which are on display at the Santo Domingo Cultural Center.

Autobuses Turísticos tour buses depart for Monte Albán several times a day from the Hotel Mesón del Angel, a couple of blocks southwest of Plaza Principal at Calle Mina #518 (at the corner of Calle Mier y Terán). The round-trip fare is about \$4 (U.S.). The half-hour ride to the site is very slow but very scenic. There is a museum (with exhibit information in Spanish only), a bookstore and a casual restaurant at the site entrance. Licensed guide service is available for a fee.

**Phone:** (951) 516-1215.

THREE DIAMOND
INSPECTED 
CLEAN

SANTO DOMINGO CULTURAL CENTER is 5 blks. n. of the Zócalo, next to the Church of Santo Domingo. The building alone makes the center a mustivisit—a former Dominican convent that has been beautifully restored to highlight remnants of colonial-era murals and the lovely stonework embellishing arches and stairways. But this also is one of the city's best museums, with exhibits that chart the course of human development in the Valley of Oaxaca.

The showcase display features some 500 pieces of priceless jewelry and art objects—goblets, urns, masks, breastplates—made of gold, turquoise, jade, amber and obsidian that were found in Tomb 7 of the Monte Albán ruins. The museum also contains fascinating, carefully organized collections of regional handicrafts, costumes worn by the different Indian groups within the state, and archeological artifacts. Background information is in Spanish.

The Francisco de Burgoa Library contains more than 30,000 volumes published from the late 15th through the mid-20th centuries. On the grounds (once the site of the convent's orchards) is a garden (Jardín Etnobotánico) with an extensive collection of indigenous plants that have historical and cultural connections to the region. The garden is only accessible as part of a guided tour.

Time: Allow 2 hours minimum. Phone: (951) 516-2991.

**ZÓCALO** is bordered on the n. by Calle Miguel Hidalgo and on the s. by Calle Valerio Trujano/Vicente Guerrero. Indian laurel trees shade the city's main square, fountains add a soothing burble and a wrought-iron gazebo and bandstand stands at the center. Early evening, when a formal flag-lowering ceremony is performed and people start to gather, is a good time to arrive.

The Zócalo really comes alive at dusk. Street musicians and dancers engage in impromptu performances. Food and handicraft vendors hawk ice cream, roast corn, pineapple chunks, *chorizo* (sausage), musical instruments, balloons, children's toys and tin skeletons dancing on the end of sticks. Band concerts—from brass to marimba to Oaxacan rock—take place regularly.

AZUL DE OAXACA HOTEL & GALERIA BOOK NOW 951/501-0016

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# PALENQUE, CHIAPAS

The town of Palenque, some 145 kilometers (90 miles) southeast of Villahermosa, has little to offer tourists, although there are hotels and restaurants around its main plaza. It does, however, provide access to the Mayan ruins of Palenque (see attraction listing), designated a World Heritage Site by UNESCO in 1987. Occupying the lower foothills of the Sierra Madre in one of Mexico's wettest, most lushly forested regions, Palenque (pah-LEHNkeh) is perhaps the most haunting archeological site in the entire country.

This ancient city most likely began as a farming settlement around 150 B.C. and flourished between A.D. 600 and 800, when it ruled an area covering much of the present-day states of Chiapas and Tabasco. Palengue was abandoned around A.D. 900 for reasons unknown but still debated by historians.

Large-scale excavations in the 1920s under the supervision of Danish explorer Frans Blom (see San Cristóbal de las Casas) began clearing away centuries of earth and encroaching jungle. Subsequent excavations have

brought to light significant knowledge about Palengue, its inhabitants, its culture and its central role within the Mayan empire.

Travel agencies in Villahermosa, Tuxtla Gutiérrez and San Cristóbal de Las Casas can provide information on reaching Palenque by first-class bus; the trip takes 2 to 3 hours from Villahermosa and about 6 hours from Tuxtla Gutiérrez. Although the ruins can be adequately toured in half a day, staying overnight makes for a less hurried agenda.

From Villahermosa, motorists should take Mex. 186 to Catazajá, then Mex. 199 south to the ruins. Passing through lush countryside, the roadway is generally straight, although slick during the June-through-October rainy season and potholed at any time of year.

Mex. 199 intersects Avenida Juárez about half a mile west of the town's main plaza; the junction is designated by a large statue of a Maya chieftain's head. The road to the ruins branches west off Mex. 199 less than half a mile south of this junction. If you arrive by first-class bus, colectivo shuttle buses and taxis run between the center of town and the ruins.

Please refer to pages 10-11 for Inspected Clean details.

The winter months—November through February—are a better time to visit than in the summer, when it is oppressively hot and humid. Arrive early to avoid both the heat and the crowds, and wear a hat and sunblock for protection from the sun. An all-weather jacket or other rain gear will come in handy at any time. Insect repellent is necessary if you plan on doing any exploring, particularly in the late afternoon.

Chiapas State Tourism Office (Delegación de Turismo): on Mex. 199 (Carretera Palenque-Pakal) near the Comfort Inn Palenque. Open Mon.-Sat. 9-9, Sun. 9-1. Information on transportation to the ruins can be obtained here.

**AGUA AZUL WATERFALLS** (Cascadas de Agua Azul) are about 68 km (42 mi.) s. of Palenque via Mex. 199, toward the town of Ocosingo; the entrance is about 4 km (2.5 mi.) w. of the highway via a signed turn-off.

Although not very high, the broad series of cascades plunge dramatically over enormous boulders into clear pools that have a jungle backdrop. Wooden deck platforms provide good views. Swimming is permitted but not recommended; currents can be strong and submerged rocks are hazardous.

Several uphill walkways cover the spread-out grounds, and numerous makeshift huts serve as market stalls and simple eateries. The grounds are also overrun with vendors aggressively hawking their wares. Intentional burning in April and May to clear the jungle can result in a thick haze of smoke. The water also is murky and silt-laden after heavy rains.

The journey to Agua Azul is along a pocked, two-lane blacktop road that winds sinuously through mountainous terrain. Although the views are spectacular, the roadway abuts steep cliffs and there are no shoulders. It also bristles with *topes* (speed bumps). Unless you crave adventure or are very adept at negotiating mountainous terrain, do not attempt the trip in a car.

**Note:** Close to the falls there are locations where local residents not only try to stop traffic to sell beverages, locally grown fruit and other items but may also demand an additional "admission" from unsuspecting tourists. It's safer and easier to visit the falls as part of a guided tour. Travel agencies in Palenque offer day trip packages; inquire along Avenida Juárez near the main plaza.

**Misol-Ha** is about 19 km (12 mi.) s. of Palenque off Mex. 199; watch for the signed turn-off. This waterfall is a shorter trip and is equally beautiful; it drops approximately 90 feet into a wide pool. Both Misol-Ha and Agua Azul can be very crowded on weekends and holidays.

PALENQUE RUINS are about 8 km (5 mi.) s.w. of town via an access road that branches off Mex. 199 a short distance s. of the city cemetery (Panteón Municipal). Despite a remote location, this archeological site is a must-see. The excavated section—small in relation to the city's size during its heyday more than 1,000 years ago—spreads a mile or so from east to west. The ruins here are among the best preserved in Mesoamerica. Stone plaques at each structure offer descriptions in English.

Next to the Temple of the Inscriptions (see sub-attraction listing) is Temple XIII, where a tomb was discovered in 1994. Just east of this temple is the Palace, a complex of stepped buildings and four courtyards connected by corridors and an extensive system of underground passageways. The exterior walls are adorned with the beautifully carved, unusually well-preserved panels and stucco reliefs for which Palenque is famous.

Cross the Río Otolum (little more than a stream) to reach the Temple of the Cross, at the southeastern edge of the ruins. It is one of several structures ringing a spacious plaza. Projecting upward from the temple are vertical roof combs, a decorative architectural feature favored by Mayan builders. Inside the building is a small shrine.

Nearby are Temple 14, which contains more stone tablets with carved inscriptions, and the Temple of the Sun, believed to contain the tomb of King Pacal's son, Chan-Bahlum, his successor to the throne. At the site's northern end is the Northern Group of buildings, including a ball court and the Temple of the Count, named for Frederick Waldeck, an early explorer. This structure, the best preserved of the group, is made up of five stepped tiers; its main facade faces east.

Don't miss the museum and visitor center, on the access road about a mile before the ruins entrance. The museum displays reproductions of hieroglyphic panels and artifacts uncovered during the excavations, including the carved tomb of Pacal. Background information is provided in English. Save the museum for the end of your visit, as the air-conditioned interior offers a refreshing respite from the heat.

Most area hotels have in-house tour representatives who can schedule an organized excursion, and there also are several sightseeing tour offices along the main street in the town of Palenque. If you go on your own, official tour guides (identified by their ID badges) can be hired at the ruins entrance; unofficial guides also can be hired for a lower rate. There are numerous vendor stalls at the entrance, and more vendors inside the park selling souvenirs.

**Note:** Visit as early as possible in the morning to beat both the heat and the bus tours. Bring insect repellent, sunscreen, a hat and water (water also is sold outside the

ruins). Visitors are permitted to climb most of the structures. Phone: (916) 345-2721.

**Temple of the Inscriptions** (Templo de las Inscripciones) is to the right as you enter the Agua Azul Waterfalls site. This 90-foot-tall pyramidal structure is one of Palenque's most impressive. The temple was the final resting place of Pacal, the king who ruled Palengue for almost 70 years beginning at the ripe old age of 12. It is believed to be one of the only temples in Mexico constructed expressly to be a tomb. A steep flight of stone block stairs descends to the royal crypt (closed to visitors). Note: Climbing on the pyramid is not permitted.

## PAPANTLA, VERACRUZ

Note: For current information about safety/security issues in Papantla, refer to the U.S. State Department website (travel.state.gov).

Papantla (pah-PAHN-tlah) spreads out over the green foothills of the Sierra Madre Oriental, about 243 kilometers (150 miles) northwest of Veracruz. This was the capital of the Totonac kingdom in the mid-15th century, before it fell to the conquering Aztecs. The vanquished Totonacs extracted a revenge of sorts by aiding Hernando Cortés in defeating the Aztecs. The city remains a center of Totonac culture today, and visitors are likely to see locals wearing native garb: billowing white pants and sailor shirts for men, lacy skirts and embroidered white blouses for women.

This is Mexico's vanilla-producing center, and the distinctively sweet scent frequently hovers in the air. Vanilla bean pods are fashioned into small figures that are sold around town, along with textiles, embroidered clothing and baskets. Souvenir hunters also can try the Hidalgo Market (Mercado Hidalgo), on Avenida 20 de Noviembre just off the northwest corner of the main plaza, for handmade men's and women's clothing.

Papantla is celebrated for its Papantla Flyers (Voladores de Papantla), Totonac Indians who give an exciting rendition of the "Flying Pole" dance. Ropes that have been wound around a 70-foot-tall pole are tied around their waists. Four dancers jump backward off a tiny revolving platform atop the pole, whirling downwards as the ropes unwind. A fifth man, who dances while playing a flute and beating a drum, remains on top of the platform. Each performer revolves around the pole 13 times; the total number of revolutions, 52, equals the number of years in the Aztec religious life cycle.

Before it evolved into a crowd-pleasing spectacle of its own, the dance was part of a pre-Hispanic agricultural ceremony designed to secure the favor of the rain gods and to celebrate the vanilla harvest. The dancers perform up to three times a day during the Festival of Corpus Christi in late May and early June. Papantla's signature annual event, the festival is celebrated with art exhibitions, traditional dances and fireworks displays.

Overlooking the city from a hilltop is a giant likeness of a flute-playing volador, a monument erected in 1988. There are good views of the surrounding countryside from the base of the statue, which can be reached by walking up Avenida Reforma from the cathedral.

The first-class Autobuses del Oriente (ADO) bus station is at the intersection of avenidas Venustiano Carranza and Benito Juárez, north of Plaza Tellez (see attraction listing). From the station there is service to Jalapa and Veracruz.

EL TAJÍN is about 13 kilometers (8 miles) w. of Papantla via a paved road, following signs. The main pantla via a paved road, following signs. The main reason to come to Papantla is to visit these impressive ruins, which were first discovered in the late 18th century. A major restoration project began in 1992, the same year that El Tajín (tah-HEEN) was designated a World Heritage Site by UNESCO. Some 40 structures, divided into four sections, have been excavated and restored.

The largest building is the Pyramid of the Niches. Constructed of adobe and stone, its seven terraces are punctuated by 365 deeply recessed niches on all four sides. This pyramid was once painted red, and the niches were black. A smaller pyramid, Building 5, is just to the south.

North of the Pyramid of the Niches in the Tajín Chico section is the Temple of the Columns, which has six richly carved column shafts—three on each side—that once supported a ceiling/roof. Large portions of the roof are scattered below near one of the site's 17 ball courts (six can be visited). The best vantage point of the entire site is from the rear of the Tajín Chico building group.

The museum near the entrance contains display cases of artifacts retrieved from the excavations; information signs are in English and Spanish. Two dioramas depict the site. Also on display are photos of the moon and sun rising over the pyramids.

The Papantla Flyers will perform the well-known flying pole dance just outside the main entrance whenever there are enough tourists—usually tour groups—to form an appreciative audience. A 20-peso donation per person is reguested to watch the spectacle, which is not without risk to its daredevil performers; the flyers also will put on a special show for a 400-peso fee.

Stone pathways connect the four sections. Climbing the pyramids is not permitted. Bring a water bottle and wear a hat and sunblock for protection, as the site has little shade. Also pick up a free Spanish-language brochure at the admission desk; it has a good map of the site.

The tourist information office in Papantla can provide information about sightseeing tours to the ruins, although English is not likely to be spoken. Minibuses marked "Chote/Tajín" depart from Avenida 16 de Septiembre at the main plaza (the street running along the uphill side of the cathedral).

From Mexico City, Papantla is a 3- to 4-hour drive via Mex. 130; from Veracruz, Papantla is about 225 kilometers (140 miles) north via Mex. 180. Both highways are safe to drive, although getting to Papantla from Veracruz, visiting the ruins and then returning to Veracruz makes for a very long day. ADO bus service is available from Mexico City and Veracruz to Papantla. Travel (especially by bus) from the state of Tamaulipas, north of Papantla, is not recommended.

**Note:** Expect checkpoint stops (police searching for guns and ammunition) on Mex. 180. This highway also is rough in some places. Avoid driving after dark if possible. **Phone:** (784) 842-8354.

# SAN CRISTÓBAL DE LAS CASAS, CHIAPAS

San Cristóbal (sahn krees-TOH-bahl) de Las Casas is named for Bartolomé de Las Casas, a New World settler and Dominican priest who was appointed bishop of Chiapas in 1545 and became famous for his advocacy on behalf of the indigenous peoples of Mexico and the Caribbean—a position bolstered after he witnessed the atrocities committed by Spanish *conquistadores*. Three years after independence from Spain was won in 1821, San Cristóbal became the Chiapan state capital and remained so until 1892, when the capital was moved to Tuxtla Gutiérrez.

San Cristóbal and Chiapas made international headlines in 1994, Mexico's most politically turbulent year since the 1910 Revolution. Indian guerrillas calling themselves the Zapatista National Liberation Army (in honor of revolutionary leader Emiliano Zapata) occupied San Cristóbal and several other mountain towns, demanding more land and a measure of self-rule for their communities. The rebellion, which left more than 100 dead over 12 days, was a violent reminder that large numbers of poor Indian farmers were not sharing in the country's prosperity.

While social injustices are understandably taken very seriously in Mexico, visitors aren't likely to see evidence of political tension in San Cristóbal outside of the occasional demonstration or graffiti-scrawled wall. Tourism contributes greatly to the local income, and visitors come from around the world; some street vendors sell skimasked dolls representing Zapatista guerrilla leader Subcomandante Marcos—a popular souvenir—along with the usual trinkets.

The city lies in a highland valley where the surrounding pine and oak forests are sprinkled with orchids and ferns. Here the whitewashed walls and cobblestone streets typical of other Mexican colonial cities have a mystical backdrop of cloud-shrouded mountain peaks. The evening air is redolent with the smoky fragrance of burning ocote, a pitch-pine kindling sold in local markets.

Although at a tropical latitude, the altitude, cool weather and frequent fog lend San Cristóbal a decidedly non-tropical feeling. And this is where Central America begins, culturally if not politically; the border with Guatemala lies little more than 160 kilometers (100 miles) southeast.

#### **Practicalities**

Getting to remote San Cristóbal takes some planning. The easiest way is to fly into Tuxtla Gutiérrez International Airport (Aeropuerto Internacional Angel Albino Corzo), which is south of the city and southwest of San Cristóbal. Airlines providing service to the airport include Aeroméxico, American, Delta, Interject and Volaris. For additional information about airlines see Arriving by Air, page p. 28.

A taxi ride from Tuxtla Gutiérrez to San Cristóbal will cost about \$50 (U.S.). The drive from Tuxtla east to San Cristóbal takes about 1.5 hours via Mex. 190. It winds for some 83 kilometers (51 miles) in a series of S-curves around high mountain peaks, frequently above cloud level. The elevation ascends some 5,000 feet between the two cities. The two-lane road passes through beautiful, unspoiled scenery, but slippery pavement during the June-through-October rainy season can make the surface dangerous.

**Note:** If you're unfamiliar with mountain driving, exercise caution. Never drive at a faster speed than conditions warrant, downshift to a lower gear when climbing or going down steep grades, and use particular caution when negotiating curves. Also keep in mind that high elevations often experience changeable weather and can cause headaches or shortness of breath if you're not used to the altitude.

First-class bus service to and from Tuxtla Gutiérrez, Palenque, Villahermosa, Oaxaca and Mérida is offered by Autotransportes Cristóbal Colón and ADO. These two lines share a bus terminal at the intersection of Mex. 190 and Avenida Insurgentes, about 9 blocks south of the main plaza. Bus tickets can be purchased at the terminal or at the Ticket Bus agency in downtown San Cristóbal, at

Avenida Belisario Domínguez #8 (a block northeast of the main plaza).

Most of San Cristóbal's visitor-related attractions, restaurants and shopping areas are within walking distance of the main plaza. For trips to Indian villages in the vicinity (see Nearby Destinations), passenger vans (colectivos) and taxis depart from locations along Mex. 190 in the vicinity of the first-class bus terminal. Combis (Volkswagen vans) make regular runs from Mex. 190 (pickup is by the main bus terminal) north to downtown via Avenida Crescencio Rosas. Taxi rides within town average about \$3 (U.S.); a knowledge of Spanish will be helpful when determining the exact fare.

Chiapas, Mexico's southernmost state, is largely mountainous and forested, and the stunning natural scenery from mist-shrouded peaks and cascading waterfalls to steamy jungles inhabited by many kinds of wildlife makes it a fascinating place to explore. ATC Tours conducts a variety of regional eco-oriented adventures, including bird-watching trips, hikes to observe butterflies and orchids, and hiking and white-water rafting excursions. The San Cristóbal office is at Av. 16 de Septiembre #16 at Calle 5 de Febrero, a block northwest of the main plaza; for information phone (967) 678-2550.

A local tour company that offers city tours with an Englishspeaking guide is Explorando Chiapas. Sightseeing excursions also can be arranged to the ruins of Palengue, Sumidero Canyon, the Agua Azul and Misol-Ha waterfalls, and the Indian villages of Chamula and Zinacantán. The office is at Real de Guadalupe #54 (Calle Guadalupe Victoria), about seven blocks east of the main plaza. Phone (967) 147-6483; explorandochiapas.com.mx.

# City Layout

Plaza 31 de Marzo, the main plaza, is between avenidas 16 de Septiembre and 20 de Noviembre and calles 5 de Febrero and Guadalupe Victoria. It's a good starting place for exploring downtown. The surrounding colonial-era buildings are stylistically Spanish, although the atmosphere is unmistakably Indian. If you stop here to relax and observe daily life, you'll likely be approached by street vendors (mostly women and children). The scene is especially bustling in the evening, when families congregate and the air is filled with aromas wafting from food carts. Musicians normally play on weekend evenings at the gazebo in the center of the plaza.

On the plaza's north side stands San Cristóbal's 16thcentury Cathedral. It was constructed in 1528 and rebuilt in 1693. Some of the exterior carvings of saints are missing their heads. The bright yellow exterior is particularly lovely in the late afternoon sun, and beautifully illuminated at night.

The west side is dominated by the arcaded, yellow-andwhite Municipal Palace, distinguished by its numerous arcades. At the plaza's southeast corner is the House of Diego Mazariegos, which dates from the 16th century and now houses a hotel; the building's detailed exterior stonework is an example of the plateresque architectural style.

The narrow streets of the historic center are laid out in an easy-to-navigate grid pattern. As in other Mexican cities, street names change depending on geographical orientation to the main plaza. The principal north-south thoroughfare is called Avenida Insurgentes south of the plaza and General M. Utrilla north of it; Calle Francisco I. Madero, the principal east-west thoroughfare, becomes Diego de Mazariegos west of the plaza. Similarly, northsouth Avenida 16 de Septiembre changes to Crescencio Rosas south of the plaza; east-west Calle María Adelina Flores is named 5 de Febrero west of the plaza.

Opposite the plaza's northwest corner on Avenida 16 de Septiembre is the Museum of Jade (Museo del Jade). Exhibits include jewelry, reproductions of Olmec carvings and a painstaking replica of the sarcophagus lid from the tomb of King Pacal, ruler of Palenque for more than 70 years.

Three blocks south of the plaza, just off Avenida Miguel Hidalgo, is the 1587 Church of El Carmen (Templo del Carmen); a street passes through the middle of its fourstory arch. Crowning one of the rolling hills east of the center of town (about 10 blocks east of the main plaza via Calle Real de Guadalupe) is the Church of the Virgin of Guadalupe. Walk 79 steps to the top of the hill for a view that takes in the entire city.

Surrounding the downtown core is a patchwork quilt of neighborhoods (barrios) that originally developed around specific trades—carpenters, blacksmiths, candle makers. Today ladinos-Mexicans of non-Indian descent-live in these neighborhoods of one-story, pastel-colored stucco houses with red-tiled roofs and wrought-iron window grills.

Mex. 190, the Pan-American Highway, runs through the southern part of town on its way to the Guatemalan border. The official name is Boulevard Juan Sabines, but it's known locally as "El Bulevar."

# Dining, Nightlife and Events

Chiapanecan cuisine incorporates such reliable Mexican standbys as tamales, enchiladas and tacos, although they're often enhanced with distinctively flavored herbs and hot sauces. A popular local beverage is atole, a lightly sweetened drink made from cornmeal, and vendors outside the cathedral sell corn on the cob and other snacks from their carts. San Cristóbal restaurants also offer numerous vegetarian options.

El Fogón de Jovel, a block west of the main plaza at Av. 16 de Septiembre #11 (at Calle Guadalupe Victoria), has a courtyard and live music, all the better to enjoy such specialties as chicken in *pipián*, a traditional *mole* sauce made from ground pumpkin seeds, chile peppers and other seasonings. Another restaurant close to the main plaza—and a popular local hangout—is Emiliano's Moustache, Calle Crescensio Rosas #7 (at Avenida Mazariegos). The tacos come with various fillings, and tortillas are handmade.

La Paloma is just south of the main plaza at Calle Miguel Hidalgo #3, the pedestrian-only street called the Andador Turístico. This bright, hip little cafe has good Mexican choices like squash flower soup, cactus salad and abalone in chipotle sauce. For something non-Mexican try Restaurant L'Edén, 2 blocks northwest of the main plaza at Calle 5 de Febrero (in the Hotel El Paraíso). The menu features Swiss-inspired dishes, including raclette (melted cheese draped over potatoes) and fondue.

Businesses on Real de Guadalupe cater to tourists, and this also is a convenient place to have breakfast. La Casa del Pan, Real de Guadalupe #55, emphasizes healthy vegetarian dishes made with regionally grown grains and beans. The bread is fresh-baked, and the coffee is a good reason to linger. The shop in the restaurant sells organic coffee beans, raw chocolate and other local products.

Hotel bars and several nightclubs, all in the historic downtown area, offer live music ranging from salsa and jazz to reggae, rock and cover versions of old top 40 hits. The choice is greatest on weekends, but there is something going on almost every night of the week. Musicians play most evenings at El Cocodrilo, in the Hotel Santa Clara (on Avenida Insurgentes across from the south side of the main plaza). Latino's, a block east of the main plaza at Av. Francisco I. Madero #23, features Latin music.

San Cristóbal's Spring Fair (Feria de la Primavera y de la Paz) takes place the week after Easter. The festivities include parades, bullfights, band concerts, handicraft exhibits, amusement rides and food stalls dishing up an array of regional specialties. Carnaval celebrations, featuring a parade of revelers dressed in vivid costumes, are held just before Lent.

The Indian village of San Juan Chamula is noted for its religious observances, particularly those celebrated during Holy Week (between Palm Sunday and Easter Sunday). A blend of Christian and pagan rites, the ceremonies take place both inside the village church and on the plaza in front of it. On June 24, a Catholic priest visits the village to baptize newborn children.

Carnaval celebrations, featuring a parade of vivid costumes, are held just before Lent. The rollicking Feast of St. John the Baptist (San Juan Bautista), the patron saint of San Juan Chamula, is observed June 22-25. The Feast

of San Cristóbal, held July 17-25, honors the town's patron saint. Pilgrims carrying torches climb the steep hill to the Church of San Cristóbal (see attraction listing) to attend special services.

The Feast Day of the Virgin of Guadalupe begins at the end of November, with almost daily parade processions to the Church of the Virgin of Guadalupe. Fireworks are set off, creating a series of small explosions running down the street to the church, and the street is blocked off so food stands and carnival rides can be set up. The festivities culminate on Dec. 12, the Feast Day of the Virgin of Guadalupe, with a fireworks show and general merrymaking.

Chiapanecos also celebrate—along with the rest of Mexico—the Days of the Dead Nov. 1 and 2 and celebrations of Jesus' birth during the Christmas season.

Chiapas State Tourism Office (Secretaría de Turismo): Av. Miguel Hidalgo #1B, about a block s. of the main plaza. Open Mon.-Sat. 8-8, Sun. 9-2. Phone: (967) 678-6570.

Check the bulletin board at the municipal tourist office, in the Municipal Palace building (Ayuntamiento) just off Parque Central near the main plaza, for notices pertaining to cultural events and guided tours, and at each office about arranging excursions to points of interest in and around San Cristóbal. There usually is at least one English-speaking staff member on hand at each office.

Shopping: The Municipal Market, 8 blocks north of the main plaza between avenidas General M. Utrilla and Belisario Domínguez, spreads out over blocks and is worth visiting just to observe the colorfully attired merchants and customers. It's open every day but Sunday, when the local village markets take over; Saturday morning is the best time to visit. Produce, flower stands, Chiapan coffee beans and household items dominate the open-air portion; butcher stalls are within the covered section. Be very discreet about taking photographs of vendors or shoppers (or don't take them at all), and watch out for pickpockets.

If you're searching for handicrafts, try the shops along Calle Real de Guadalupe in the blocks just east of the main plaza. The quality is evident in the lovely woolen shawls, *huipiles* (white cotton dresses embroidered with flower and geometric designs), bolts of fabric, leather goods, woven blankets and amber jewelry. Women and children will often approach tourists on the street selling dolls, bracelets and other handmade items.

The government-run House of Crafts (Casa de las Artesanías), 2 blocks south of the main plaza at Calle Niñoes Héroes and Avenida Hidalgo, stocks a representative selection of woolen vests, embroidered blouses and other

clothing, amber jewelry, ceramics and textiles. An exhibition room showcases the native dress of villagers in the surrounding Indian communities.

Sna Jolobil, on Calzada Lázaro Cardenas within the Temple and Ex-Convent of Santo Domingo (see attraction listing), is a crafts cooperative run by Tzeltal and Tzotzil Indians, who also handcraft the high-quality merchandise on display. The name means "weaver's house." Another cooperative effort is Taller Lenateros, east of the main plaza at Calle Flavio A. Paniagua #54. In addition to crafts, the workshop—where artisans can be observed on the job—creates ingenious postcards, book binders and writing paper.

La Galeria, Calle Hidalgo #3, spotlights well-known artists and also sells turquoise and silver jewelry. The restaurant above the gallery features live music in the evening.

About 37 kilometers (23 miles) southeast of San Cristóbal via Mex. 190 is the Tzeltal village of Amatenango del Valle, known for its women potters. The pottery is fired by wood rather than in a kiln. You can buy directly from local families, whose wares include simple jugs and pots as well as animalito (animal) figures. The women wear huipiles embroidered with distinctive red and yellow designs.

# **Nearby Destinations**

The ethnic peoples populating the nearby communities north of San Cristóbal are among the most resilient in the country. They have managed to maintain their cultural identity over hundreds of years and also in the face of drastic modernization. Although almost all are members of the Tzeltal, Tzotzil and Chamula tribes, the inhabitants of these mountain villages retain a striking variety of differences in manner of dress, dialect, and religious customs and ceremonies.

Men frequently leave the villages to find work; women tend to the cornfields, take care of the children and run the market stalls. Women are often seen bent under a load of firewood, balanced on their backs with the aid of a strap fitted across the forehead. Among the handicrafts produced by village artisans are wooden musical instruments, leather goods, ceramics, furniture and woven baskets. The best time to visit is during a fiesta or on Sunday morning, when most of the villages have their own market and tourists are most welcomed.

San Juan Chamula, about 10 kilometers (6 miles) northwest of San Cristóbal via a paved road, is the best-known village. Spanish is not spoken, and English is rarely heard. Daily life centers on the town church (Iglesia de

San Juan Bautista), where the religious rituals are a fascinating blend of Christian and non-Christian. The church is named for St. John the Baptist, a religious figure who in this region takes precedence over Jesus Christ.

The white stucco structure, which stands next to the main plaza, has a beautifully carved wooden door. Inside the dimness is illuminated by a sea of flickering candles, the tile floor is strewn with pine needles and the smell of incense wafts throughout. There are no pews; people sit on the floor. Statues of saints line the walls, swaddled in layers of brightly colored cloth. While worshippers chant and pray in front of these statues, they figure in church rituals in name only; Catholicism is not observed by the villagers.

You must obtain a 10-peso ticket to enter the church; tickets are available at the local tourist office on the main plaza. Visitors may stand and observe quietly in the background while prayer or curing rituals are being performed, which often involve rubbing the bodies of the sick with eggs or chicken bones. People also drink from bottles of Coca-Cola—the resultant burping is thought to expel evil spirits from the body—and some imbibe posh, a more potent beverage made from fermented sugarcane. Photography is strictly forbidden. Do not wear a hat inside.

Near the church is Ora Ton, a small museum that displays musical instruments and examples of traditional clothing. The ticket allowing admittance to the church includes admission to the museum.

Zinacantán is about 11 kilometers (7 miles) northwest of San Cristóbal; the road to this village forks west off the road to San Juan Chamula and descends into a valley. Zinacantán's side-by-side churches also have floors covered in pine needles, but the rituals here incorporate Catholicism to a greater degree. Photography, both inside and out, is strictly prohibited, and you may be escorted in rather than being allowed to enter on your own. A small fee also is charged.

Unless you feel comfortable assimilating into an unfamiliar culture, a guided trip is the best way to experience a bit of daily life in these villages. Small group tours with an English-speaking guide are offered by the Na-Bolom Museum (see attraction listing). The fee is about \$15 (U.S.) per person.

Note: A visit to any local village involves sensitivity and respect, as you are an outsider and may well be made to feel like one. Picture taking is forbidden at most events, particularly so inside churches, and residents may not take kindly to being stared at. Photography of any sort is generally objected to, so keep cameras packed. Youthful vendors in San Juan Chamula, many of whom live in desperate poverty, will hawk tourists aggressively.

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# TAXCO, GUERRERO

Travel Advisory: We do not recommend travel to the state of Guerrero due to the U.S. Department of State's "Do Not Travel" warning. The acute level of crime and violence in this area prohibits AAA inspections.

Probably the oldest mining town in North America, Taxco (TAHS-coh) was the Indian village of Tlachco (meaning "place of ball game") when Hernando Cortés' captains discovered rich gold deposits. Initial development began after José de la Borda, a French miner, arrived in 1716 and amassed an immense fortune. Borda's initial impact on the mining industry was carried on by a young American named William Spratling, who came to Taxco in 1929 to write a book. Stranded in Mexico after his publisher went broke, Spratling turned to the silver business. He opened a retail outlet and found apprentices among the local youth, many of whom went on to become proprietors of their own silver shops.

Plaza Borda, Taxco's main square, is typical of those in other old Mexican towns: tree shaded, with benches for relaxation and a bandstand for musical performances. The shops in and around the plaza specialize in silver, and shopping for it is undoubtedly the most popular tourist activity in town. The range of items in Taxco's more than 300 silver shops covers everything from inexpensive trinkets to artistic pieces selling for hundreds of dollars.

The price is usually determined by weight, and many shops sell both retail (menudeo) and wholesale (mayoreo). Always check for the stamp bearing the numerals ".925," which certifies that it is at least 92.5 percent sterling silver, and for the two-letter initials signifying the manufacturer. If you're looking for items at the less expensive end of the scale, try the Silver Market (Mercado de Artesanías Plata), a block or so southeast of Plaza Borda; the stalls here carry a huge selection of rings, chains and other jewelry.

Much pageantry is associated with Holy Week (Semana Santa). On Palm Sunday an image of Christ on a donkey departs the nearby village of Tehuilotepec, east of town, for a processional to Taxco. Candlelit processions by penitentes take place nightly, culminating on Holy Thursday, when the Last Supper is staged in front of the Church of Santa Prisca (see attraction listing). The Resurrection re-enactment takes place on Saturday evening, and another processional occurs on Easter Sunday. If you plan on being in town during Holy Week, make hotel reservations in advance.

The weeklong National Silver Fair (Feria Nacional de la Plata), held the last week in November or the first week in December, is Mexico's foremost silversmith competition. Each year judges confer international recognition to artisans whose designs and workmanship are deemed superior. Craftsmen from around the world display and sell their wares.

Another annual event of interest to visitors is Alarcón Days (Jornadas Alarconianas). This cultural and artistic festival offers painting expositions, band serenades in Plaza Borda and musical performances during the last three weekends in May; check with the State Tourism Office for exact dates. Presentations of plays by Juan Ruiz de Alarcón, a Taxco native born of noble Spanish parentage who wrote his works during the same period as Miguel de Cervantes, are given in city plazas.

Steep, narrow roads, infrequent street name designations and many one-way streets make driving in Taxco difficult. Walking is the best way to explore. Combis are a convenient and inexpensive means of local transportation; rides in these white Volkswagen minibuses are about 50c (U.S.) in town. Taxi fares in town average about \$3 to \$4; taxis also are available for visiting points of interest in the surrounding area.

A particularly scenic way to appreciate Taxco's mountain setting is by taking a ride on the Monte Gondola, which departs near the entrance to town. The cars hold up to four people, and the views as they ascend to the Hotel Monte Taxco are spectacular. There are a few shops and a snack bar at the top, and another panoramic vista from the hotel terrace. The cable car operates daily; the last car comes down at 6:50 p.m.

"Tour guides" will eagerly approach visitors around Plaza Borda. Ask to see their credentials, and beware of freelance guides who are not federally licensed or government sponsored. The State Tourism Office can recommend a reliable licensed guide.

Guerrero State Tourism Office (Secretaría de Fomento **Turístico):** Av. J.F. Kennedy #1 (Mex. 95), at the north end of town where the aqueduct arches cross the highway. Open daily 9-8.

CHURCH OF SANTA PRISCA (Iglesia de Santa Prisca) faces the main square. It was funded by José de la Borda in gratitude for his good fortune in mining. Begun in 1751

and completed 7 years later, the church has a beautifully carved facade with twin 130-foot spires flanking a tiled dome. The interior is even more elaborate, a breathtaking profusion of gold-leaf saints and cherubs, 12 highly decorated altars and lovely paintings by Miguel Cabrera, one of Mexico's most celebrated colonial-era artists; Borda spared no expense in making this a beautifully appointed church.

Guides approach visitors outside offering tours. For a few pesos you'll receive some enlightening background information, but determine whether the fee applies to an individual or group tour and make sure the guide speaks understandable English. Time: Allow 1 hour minimum. **Phone:** (762) 622-0184 or (762) 622-0183.

# **TUXTLA GUTIÉRREZ, CHIAPAS**

The discovery of vast oil reserves around Tuxtla Gutiérrez (TOOX-tlah goo-TYEH-rehs) brought an influx of people and wealth, resulting in a prosperous commercial hub and the largest city in the state of Chiapas. A concentrated availability of hotel accommodations makes it a good base for travelers exploring southern Mexico.

Unlike mountain towns at higher elevations, Tuxtla has a hot, steamy climate. But the surrounding countryside is lush, sprinkled with coffee and tobacco plantations. Scenic attractions include El Chorreadero, a waterfall emerging from the mouth of a cave that cascades down a canyon wall to pools of water below. Visitors also can explore the cave and its dramatic rock formations. The park containing the waterfall is about a 10-minute drive from the nearby city of Chiapa de Corzo; the best time to visit is during the dry season from November through March, when the water is at its clearest.

Mex. 190 runs east-west through the congested city center, changing names from Boulevard Dr. Belisario Domínguez to Carretera Internacional as it progresses east. Parque Central, the main plaza, is on both sides of the boulevard, between Calle Central Sur/Norte and Calle Segunda Sur/Norte. The twin squares are fronted by imposing government buildings, shaded by manicured trees and filled with benches.

On the south side of the boulevard stands the Catedral de San Marcos, named for the city's patron saint. It dates from the second half of the 16th century but still retains some colonial-era architectural touches. The church's gleaming white exterior is capped by a bell tower; the bells ring on the hour as mechanical figures representing the twelve apostles appear.

Shops in the vicinity of the plazas sell such items as scarves with sewn-on appliques, gold filigree jewelry and boxes made of inlaid wood, and at market stalls you can find souvenirs like brightly painted gourds. At Blvd. Dr. Belisario Domínguez #2320, west of Parque Central, is the government-run Casa de las Artesanías, which displays and sells Chiapan-made handicrafts.

First-class bus service is provided by the ADO and OCC bus lines. The ADO station is about a mile northwest of downtown on Avenida 5 Norte Poniente, adjacent to the Plaza del Sol shopping mall.

Chiapas State Tourism Office (Secretaría de Turismo): in the western part of the city at Blvd. Dr. Belisario Domínguez #950 (in the Plaza de las Instituciones building). Phone: (961) 602-5299, or 01 (800) 280-3500 (toll-free long distance within Mexico).



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## **VERACRUZ, VERACRUZ**

Note: For current information about safety/security issues in Veracruz, refer to the U.S. State Department website (travel.state.gov).

Veracruz (veh-rah-CROOS) has traditionally served as a doorway leading to the heart of Mexico as well as Mexico's gateway to the world. Its long history has been a tumultuous one, inextricably tied to the fortunes and misfortunes of Spain's presence in the New World and the attendant suffering borne out of conquest, war and subjugation. That Veracruz not only survived but blossomed into the festive, culturally vibrant city it is today is no small feat.

In 1518 Spaniard Juan de Grijalva explored the Mexican coastline from the Yucatán Peninsula west to the area around present-day Veracruz. He was followed a year later by Hernando Cortés, a 34-year-old colonist and landowner living in Cuba who set out on an expedition to conquer this uncharted territory, no doubt intrigued by tales of fabulous riches waiting to be plundered. His expedition party—several hundred Spanish soldiers, gunpowder, horses and a contingent of Cuban Indians to bear supplies—landed on the little island of San Juan de Ulúa, in the harbor along which the town was later established.

Cortés founded the first Spanish settlement in Mexico a bit farther up the coast at La Antigua (see attraction listing) before marching inland to the Aztec capital of Tenochtitlan and launching the brutal military campaign that resulted in the colonization of the continental

Americas. The name he bestowed upon Veracruz—La Villa Rica de la Vera Cruz (Rich Town of the True Cross)-turned out to be prophetic, as the port soon became the main point of departure for Spanish galleons loaded with silver from Mexican mines.

From the beginning Veracruz was bedeviled by pirate raids. Celebrated English privateer John Hawkins met his only defeat here in 1568; attempting to sell slaves in defiance of the Spanish trade monopoly, his powerful fleet was thwarted by a surprise attack. Hawkins' nephew sir Francis Drake was aboard one of two ships that escaped, and he went on to a swashbuckling career raiding Spanish ships. The construction of Fort San Juan de Ulúa (see attraction listing) was a response to the constant danger.

The main lure for today's vacationer is the tropical, laidback setting. Mexicans love Veracruz, but it's unfortunately off the radar of many foreign travelers. The city has both seductive charm and bracing energy. You'll feel it walking along waterfront Paseo de Malecón, where cargo ships, ocean liners and all manner of fishing vessels attest to this seaport's continuing importance.

# **City Layout**

Central Veracruz is fairly compact and easily negotiated, with streets laid out in a grid pattern. Street names often are posted on the corner buildings at intersections. Since it's hard to get lost, seeing the sights on foot can be a leisurely affair—and you'll want to take it easy from April through October, which is hot and humid. The city also tends to get lots of rain during these months, so an umbrella is a handy item to bring along.

A logical starting point is Plaza de Armas (also called the Zócalo). Veracruz's main square is the city's hub and one of the oldest Spanish plazas in North America. Facing its east side is the 17th-century City Hall (Palacio Municipal). On the south side stands the Cathedral (Catedral de Nuestra Señora de la Asunción), built in 1721, which has a loudly tolling bell tower.

Palm trees and black and white-tiled walkways give the plaza an appropriately tropical look, and the arched arcades, or *portales*, are a distinctive Spanish touch. The arches shelter open-air cafes that are popular places to meet and socialize over coffee in the morning, but it's evenings—after the sun has set and the heat takes a bit of a breather—that the plaza really starts to hum. Vendors hawk their wares and bars offer the regional libation *men*julep, rum and vermouth mixed with sugar and crushed mint leaf.

The seawall (malecón), a promenade running east from Plaza de Armas, hugs the harbor before turning south to follow the gulf shore. Lined with benches, it offers views of port activity and massive Fort San Juan de Ulúa across the harbor. People fish from concrete breakwater piers, their lines wrapped around small pieces of wood. Intertwined couples, families and sailors on shore leave all stroll along the walkway as vendors hawking volvones (puff pastry filled with tuna or chopped beef) exuberantly call out "Guerro!" or "Guerra!" to potential customers.

Facing the harbor at the corner of avenidas Xicotencatl and Aquiles Serdán is the Carranza Lighthouse (Faro Carranza). Mexican president Venustiano Carranza lived in this ornate-looking building during the drafting of the 1917 Mexican constitution; it now contains naval offices.

Elongated Plaza de la República, just north and west of the *malecón*, also faces the harbor. The public buildings along this plaza include the turn-of-the-19th-century Customs House (Aduana Marítima) and the pastel yellow facades of the main post office and the telegraph office.

The Fish Market, on Avenida Landero y Cos just north of Avenida Mariano Arista (2 blocks south of the harbor), is two stories tall and covers an entire block. It displays rows of fresh seafood, live crabs with red claws neatly tied with green seaweed grass and neatly stacked mountains of fish. Food stands offer seafood cocktails (cócteles) made with shrimp, oysters or octopus.

Past the malecón Boulevard M. Avila Camacho continues on to Playa Villa del Mar, about 4 kilometers (2.5 miles) south of downtown Veracruz. This and the other beaches closest to the city are not the stuff of tourist brochures; the sand is a brownish color and the gulf water is

dull green rather than an inviting turguoise. During the week fishermen mend nets or make repairs to their boats. The pace picks up on weekends, with families getting together and vendors selling fresh fish and cold beer against a backdrop of nonstop band music.

#### Music, Dance and Cuisine

Artistic expression, most notably in the form of music and dance, is as much a part of the Veracruz character as the balmy breezes blowing off the gulf. "La Bamba" popularized by Hispanic pop singer Ritchie Valens in 1959 and remade into an even bigger hit in 1987 by the East Los Angeles band Los Lobos—is actually a Veracruzan folk song. Music also underscores this region's African, Cuban, Spanish and Indian roots.

Plaza de Armas is the site of strolling mariachi players, frequent band concerts and string trios playing guitar, harp and jarana, a guitar-shaped, five-stringed instrument. In addition to the ubiquitous mariachis, you're likely to hear the lilting sound of the marimba (a relative of the xylophone), which has wooden keys that the musicians deftly strike with mallets.

The son jarocho is quintessentially Veracruzan. Set to a fast, syncopated percussion beat, it features a vigorous strumming of stringed instruments accented by a rhythmically pounded tambourine. The accompanying dance steps are a fandango-derived staccato movement of the heels known as zapateado. Son jarocho originated in the 17th and 18th centuries during a time when slaves were imported for plantation agriculture, and many jarocho musicians today are of African-Mexican heritage.

The danzón, a Cuban import influenced by European ballroom dancing, features gliding movements as partners promenade arm in arm and women wave their fans maneuvers that don't work up as much of a sweat in this hot and humid city. On Wednesday and Sunday evenings everyone from young children to elderly couples dances the danzón at Zamora Park (Parque Zamora), about 7 blocks inland from the waterfront between avenidas Independencia and 5 de Mayo.

The state of Veracruz is known for good coffee. You should accompany your breakfast with a café con leche served in a tall glass. A concentrated shot of inky black coffee is augmented by hot milk poured by waiters from silver kettles. For a refill, simply clink your spoon against the empty glass.

As delectable as the coffee is Veracruzan cuisine, with its emphasis on fresh seafood. Salsa Veracruzana—a piquant combination of tomatoes, chiles, onions, garlic, pimentos, capers and green olives sauteed in olive oil—is a perfect accompaniment to fish (or chicken or pasta, for that matter). Broiled red snapper awash in this sauce is

Specialties like torta de mariscos (a fluffy omelet) or filetes relleno (stuffed fish filets) have rich fillings of oysters, crab and shrimp enlivened with fresh lime juice and herbs. Plantains, sweet potatoes and peanuts (introduced by African slaves) are other essential ingredients in Veracruzan cookery. Peanuts are ground to make sauces for pork or chicken (such as spicy salsa macha, which also includes garlic, chiles and olive oil) and even turn up in ice cream. Plantains are fried and served with rice and beans or mashed with garlic and rolled around fillings of cheese or crabmeat.

#### **Events**

Veracruz's party of the year is Carnaval. The celebration rivals New Orleans' Mardi Gras in spectacle and enthusiasm, if not in size. The Veracruz version begins with the "burning of ill humor" and concludes with the funeral of Juan Carnaval. Parades wend their way down waterfront Boulevard Avila Camacho during the 9 days prior to Ash Wednesday, replete with lavishly decorated floats and outrageously attired revelers. Other events, including fireworks, folkloric dance shows and plenty of salsa and other music, take place around Plaza de Armas. Local hotels are booked solid for Carnaval, so if you plan on attending make reservations well in advance.

**Veracruz State Tourism Office:** on the ground floor of City Hall (Palacio Municipal), on the east side of Plaza de Armas. Open Mon.-Sat. 9-8, Sun. 10-6.

Shopping: The Hidalgo Market (Mercado Hidalgo) is between avenidas Madero and Hidalgo a block west of Zamora Park (about 7 blocks south of the *Zócalo*). This is one of those Mexican markets that is fascinating to wander through for the sheer variety of wares—everything from live parrots to bushels of produce to animal parts guaranteed to induce squirms.

If you're looking for a trinket to take home, the place to go is Paseo del Malecón; the waterfront boulevard is lined with shops and stalls selling every imaginable type of seashell knickknack, along with embroidered blouses, men's guayabera shirts—lightweight, short-sleeved garments worn untucked—coral jewelry, crucifixes and of course, T-shirts. Plaza de las Artesanías, on Paseo del Malecón 2 blocks east of Plaza de Armas, has a mix of souvenirs and high-quality merchandise.

FORT SAN JUAN DE ULÚA (Castillo San Juan de Ulúa), in the harbor on Gallega Island, can be reached from coastal hwy. Mex. 180 by taking the Puente Montecitos exit to the port area (Zona Industrial Portuaria); from the city center, take Blvd. Fidel Velazquez to the port area,

following signs. This massive fort was built by the Spanish to protect their New World interests. Construction of the thick coral walls began in the 1530s but was not completed until the late 18th century. It later served as a place of incarceration for political prisoners; even Mexican president Benito Juárez was held here.

The floating fortress, declared a historical monument in 1962, is connected to the mainland by a small walking bridge. Visitors can venture into dank prison cells and view guard posts, the remains of cannons and docking areas where gold was stored. Today this ancient rampart is surrounded by huge cargo container ships. A guided tour is recommended, since there is no signage or brochure.

Taxi fare to the fort from the city center is about 70 pesos. Boats depart for the fort from the *malecón*, across from the Hotel Emporio, whenever there are enough passengers; the fee is 35 pesos per person.

VERACRUZ AQUARIUM (Acuario de Veracruz) is s. of the harbor off Blvd. Manuel A. Camacho (in the Plaza Acuario Mall). This large, well-maintained aquarium is a great family attraction. A variety of marine creatures can be seen in three different habitats: a freshwater gallery, a saltwater gallery and an ocean tank. The freshwater exhibit replicates a tropical jungle, so in addition to tanks of fish there are turtles, crocodiles, boas and toucans. The saltwater tanks feature species from the Gulf of Mexico and the Pacific Ocean, including various colorful tropical fish, lobsters, crabs, rays, shrimp and octopuses.

The ocean tank has sharks, groupers, barracuda, turtles and other species. There also is a section devoted to manatees (the aquarium promotes marine conservation, especially of species indigenous to the Gulf of Mexico). Get an up-close look at sea urchins and crustaceans at an outdoor tide pool, or touch large turtle shells and fossils in the interactive area. The aquarium is connected to a mall that has plenty of restaurants and boutique shops.

Time: Allow 1 hour minimum. Phone: (229) 931-1020.

VERACRUZ NAVAL MUSEUM (Museo Histórico Naval) is 6 blks. from the waterfront at Calle Mariano Arista #32. It recounts Mexico's naval history from pre-Hispanic times to the present day. The building is remarkable—a two-story structure with a central courtyard and multiple arched entryways, it originally housed the Naval School of Medicine.

Exhibits in some 30 display rooms include Mayan and Aztec-era dugout canoes complete with oars, 19th-century maritime charts, depictions of notable rescue efforts, medical artifacts and a room with hundreds of firearms lining the walls and fashioned into enormous

chandeliers. A highlight is the display illustrating the first naval battle that took place in the New World, with large warships built by Hernán Cortes besieged by hundreds of small Aztec vessels. Exhibit information is in Spanish.

Time: Allow 1 hour, 30 minutes minimum. Phone: (229) 931-4078. **TI** 

## **Nearby Destinations**

The gulf beaches become more attractive the farther out of town you go. About 10 kilometers (6 miles) south of downtown via Boulevard Camacho is Playa Mocambo. Beyond Playa Mocambo, at the mouth of the Río Jamapa, is Boca del Río, a small fishing village known for its open-air seafood restaurants.

If you're looking for guiet beaches, a relaxed pace and a distinct lack of crowds—and you don't mind leaving the city well behind—consider checking out "La Costa Esmeralda" (The Emerald Coast). This 19-kilometer (12-mile) stretch of gulf coast is off Mex. 180 between the towns of Tecolutla and Nautla (about a 2-hour drive north of Veracruz). Much of the coast region is devoted to cattle ranches and farms growing sugar cane and vanilla beans, but along La Costa Esmeralda there are small motels and open-air, thatchroofed restaurants that serve seafood and shrimp cocktails in tall glasses. Streets wind past colorfully painted bungalows, tropical birds roost in the coconut palms and lounge chairs on grassy lawns look out over the water. Most visitors are content to amble along the brown-sand beaches—and if you avoid the Easter and Christmas holidays you'll probably have them mostly to yourself.

A drive into the surrounding countryside passes large ranches and pastures, tropical fruit orchards and fields of sugar cane. The change in topography can be dramatic from mangrove swamps and mazes of lagoons and estuaries to lush, mountainous country ideal for growing coffee.

Toll highway Mex. 150-D west from the gulf coast toward Puebla is a spectacularly scenic drive that begins in flat cane fields and ascends through pine forests to elevations as high as 9,000 feet. The route passes snowcapped Pico de Orizaba, at 18,555 feet Mexico's loftiest peak. Highway conditions are excellent, and there are plenty of gas stations. Quaint hamlets as well as larger cities like Córdoba, Fortín de las Flores and Orizaba offer plenty of opportunities for sightseeing, shopping or just taking in the mountain views.



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# VILLAHERMOSA, TABASCO

Villahermosa (vee-vah-ehr-MOH-sah) was founded in 1519 under the name Santa María de la Victoria. Hernando Cortés established the settlement to commemorate his defeat of an army of Indian warriors who had attacked him during his march toward the Aztec capital of Tenochtitlan. In tribute to their conqueror, the Indians gave Cortés an Indian princess. Baptized Doña Marina, she became Cortés' mistress and trusted translator, an invaluable asset in his conquest of Mexico.

A strategic location along the banks of the navigable Río Grijalva, which flows northward out of rubber, cacao and coffee country, makes Villahermosa an important distribution center. The 1970s discovery of some of the world's richest



Please refer to pages 10-11 for Inspected Clean details.

oil fields, as well as the development of extensive hydroelectric projects and successful agricultural programs, energized this hot, humid port city. A booming business center and the regional hub for Chiapas, Campeche, Tabasco and eastern Veracruz, it also makes a convenient base from which to explore points of interest in these states.

The city's central downtown district of stores, hotels and restaurants is known as the Zona Luz. It extends from Juárez Park (Parque Juárez) south to Plaza de Armas, the main plaza, and is roughly bounded by Avenida Zaragoza on the north, Avenida 5 de Mayo on the west, Avenida Allende on the south and waterfront Calle Madrazo (the malecón) on the east. Many of the streets are brick-paved pedestrian malls, closed to traffic.

The newer hotel and shopping district, Tabasco 2000, is about 6 kilometers (4 miles) northwest of the Zona Luz; it can be reached via Avenida Ruiz Cortines (Mex. 180), the main east-west thoroughfare. The wealth generated by oil is evident in this complex's contemporary government buildings, upscale hotels and sleek Galerías Tabasco 2000 mall. The Tabasco 2000 area also has the city's nicest accommodations.

First-class bus service to Campeche, Mérida, Mexico City, Palenque, San Cristóbal de Las Casas, Veracruz and other cities is offered by ADO. The ADO bus terminal is at Calle Javier Mina #297 at Calle Lino Merino, about 10 blocks northwest of the Zona Luz and 3 blocks south of Avenida Ruiz Cortines. Taxi fares within the area encompassing the city center north to Avenida Ruiz Cortines average about \$2 (U.S.) in shared colectivo taxis, about \$4 in especial taxis. Street signage features arrows indicating the direction of traffic flow, a boon for motorists who must navigate the hectic, congested downtown area.

West of the city are prosperous cacao plantations and the important archeological site of Comalcalco. A driving tour of this region reveals lush countryside that contrasts sharply with Mexico's more common arid expanses. Along

Mex. 180 toward Cárdenas are masses of banana plants laden with clusters of fruit, which is sold at roadside stands.

Cárdenas itself is a cacao processing center, and some chocolate plantations and factories offer guided tours (check with travel agencies in Villahermosa). The cacao tree grows everywhere; its large, elliptical pods bear the seeds from which cocoa and chocolate are made. The harvesting season is November through April. Small family-run operations throughout this region grow and process cacao beans that end up as boxes of chocolate. You'll also see mounds of the beans for miles along the highway, drying in the sun.

Tabasco State Tourism Office (Subsecretaría de Turismo): Avenida de Los Ríos at the corner of Calle 13 in the Tabasco 2000 complex, past the La Venta Museum and heading west out of downtown. Open Mon.-Fri. 9-3 and 6-8 p.m. Phone: 01 (800) 216-0842 (toll-free long distance within Mexico).

COMALCALCO RUINS are w. on Mex. 180 to the town of Cárdenas, then n. about 35 km (22 mi.) on Mex. 187 to the town of Comalcalco; the turnoff to the site is about 3 km (2 mi.) farther n., to the right. There are no informational highway signs en route from Villahermosa; watch for signs in Comalcalco that direct visitors to the ruins.

This large site consists of several tall pyramids spread out over grassy meadows and small hills. The structures here were constructed of thin, flat bricks called tabiques, covered with a plaster made from ground seashells, rather than the stone used elsewhere in pre-Hispanic Mexico. Heed the signs warning *No Subir* (Do Not Climb). A small one-room museum contains carved stone figures.

Descendants of the Chontal Maya, who originally inhabited Comalcalco around A.D. 600-900, still live in the area and earn a livelihood as their ancestors did by processing cacao and raising bananas and other fruits. Note: This is one of Mexico's hottest regions; visit early in the day and bring a hat or umbrella as a sunscreen.



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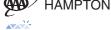
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L Lunch

D Dinner

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# **Club Contacts in Mexico**

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Roma neighborhood (M: Insurgentes, line 1).

As part of the "AAA Discounts & Rewards" program and an alliance between AAA/CAA and AMA, U.S. and Canadian members can enjoy savings with program partners. For information about "Ahorra con AMA" partners, go to the AAA Discounts & Rewards section of AAA.com on your club's website.

# Speaking of Spanish

ON THE FOLLOWING PAGES are listed some of the Spanish phrases and sentences that are most useful to an English-speaking visitor in Mexico. Although not essential, a basic knowledge of the language will be helpful. Most Mexicans who deal with tourists speak at least some English, and those who don't will be only too glad to help you along with your attempts at Spanish. Fortunately, the language is not that difficult to speak. A little study of the following rules of pronunciation will be sufficient to make yourself understood.

Even if your knowledge of Spanish is rudimentary, using such everyday expressions as por favor (please), gracias (thank you), buenos días (good morning), buenas tardes (good afternoon) and buenas noches (good evening) shows respect. Mexicans are very polite and use these terms all the time; you should also. Good manners mean more than being able to speak the language fluently.

### **Pronunciation**

The pronunciation of the Spanish language presents very few difficulties. The spelling is almost phonetic; nearly every letter has one sound that it retains at all times.

#### Vowels

A—pronounced as "a" in father.

E—pronounced as "e" in them.

I—pronounced as "e" in me.

O-pronounced as "o" in hold.

U-pronounced as "oo" in food.

#### **Consonants**

Consonants do not differ materially from those in English. The few differences are as follows:

b and v—in Mexico are pronounced as in "boy."

c—is pronounced with an "s" sound before e and i. Otherwise it has a "k" sound. Ex. cinco—seen-koh.

g—is soft, like a strong English "h," when it precedes e and i. Ex. gente—hente. In all other cases, it is a hard "g" as in go. Ex. gato—gahtoh. If gu precedes an e or i, the "g" has a hard sound and the "u" is not pronounced. Ex. guerra—geh-rah, guiso—geeh-so. If the "u" has an umlaut it is pronounced güera—gweh-rah, güiro—gwee-roh.

h—always silent, except after c, which makes a "ch" sound as in English.

j-pronounced like the English "h."

II—pronounced like the English "y." Ex. caballo—kah-BAH-yo.

ñ-combination of "n" and "y," like cognac.

Ex. niño—neenvoh.

qu—pronounced like "k." Ex. que—keh.

r—in Mexico the "r" is trilled; the "r" at the beginning of a word and the double "rr" are trilled quite strongly.

x—pronounced as in English, and also pronounced like the English "s" as in Xochimilco (soh-chih-MEEL-coh), and the English "h," as in México (ME-hee-coh). In Mexico "x" also is used to represent the "sh" sound in native languages, as in Xel-Ha (Shehl-HAH).

z—in Mexico is always pronounced like the English "s." ch, II, ñ—these are all letters in the Spanish alphabet and are found after the single letter: "ch" after "c," "II" after "l," "ñ" after "n."

## **Diphthongs**

Spanish diphthongs are pronounced as very swift omissions of the component vowels.

Ex. "ue" as in weh—fuente.

Ex. "au" as in English ouch—gaucho.

#### **Accent or Stress**

1. The stress falls on the next to the last syllable when a word ends in a vowel, "n" or "s."

Ex. hombre—OHM-breh.



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Ex. hablan—AH-blahn.

Ex. estos-EHS-tos.

2. The stress falls on the last syllable when the word ends in a consonant other than "n" or "s."

Ex. hablar—ah-BLAR.

3. In some cases an accent mark will be found over a vowel. This does not change the pronunciation of that vowel but indicates that the stress falls on that syllable.

Ex. gramática—grah-MAH-teeh-cah.

## **Words and Phrases**

Note: All nouns in Spanish are either masculine or feminine, and there are two words meaning "the": el is used before masculine nouns, la before feminine nouns. Masculine words end with an o, feminine words end with an a (although there are a few exceptions). An adjective agrees in gender with the noun it modifies. The plural of el is los, of la is las. After words given on these pages the gender is indicated by (m.) for masculine, (f.) for feminine. For instance, say el hotel and los hoteles; la posada and las posadas. The word "usted," meaning "you," is abbreviated Ud.

## Language

Do you understand English?	¿Entiende Ud. el inglés?
I do not speak Spanish	No hablo español.
Yes, sir; no, madam	Si, señor; no, señora.
Very little	Muy poco.
I do not understand	No entiendo.
Do you understand me?	¿Me entiende Ud.?
Please speak slowly	Por favor hable despacio.
I wish to speak with an interpreter	Quisiera hablar con un intérprete.
What did you say?	¿Cómo dice?

## **Polite Phrases**

Good morning	Buenos días.
Good afternoon	Buenas tardes.
Good night	Buenas noches.
Goodbye; see you later	
Thank you	Gracias.
Yes; very good	
Please	Por favor.
Excuse me	Perdóneme.
I am very sorry	Lo siento mucho.

## **To Explain Your Needs**

I need; we need	Necesito; necesitamos.
I would like to telephone	Quisiera telefonear.
I am hungry; we are hungry	Tengo hambre; tenemos hambre.
I am thirsty; we are thirsty	Tengo sed; tenemos sed.
I am cold; we are cold	Tengo frío; tenemos frío.
I am warm; we are warm	Tengo calor; tenemos calor.
I am tired; we are tired	Estoy cansado; estamos cansados.
I am sick; we are sick	Estoy enfermo; estamos enfermos.
The child is sick; tired	El niño (la niña) está enfermo (a); cansado (a).
Men's room, ladies' room	El baño de hombres, de damas.
Fire	Fuego (m.).
Help	Auxilio; socorro (m.).



## Time

today	hoy
the morning	a mañana
tomorrow	mañana
noon	el mediodía
yesterday	ayer
the afternoon	la tarde
tonight	esta noche
night	la noche
last night	anoche
midnight	la media noche
What time is it?	¿Qué hora es?
It is one o'clock	Es la una.
It is ten minutes past two	Son las dos y diez.
It is quarter past three	Son las tres y cuarto.
It is a quarter of five	Es un cuarto para las cinco.
It is 25 minutes of six	Son veinticinco para las seis.
It is half past four	Son las cuatro y media.

## Days of the Week

Sunday	domingo (m.)
Monday	lunes (m.)
Tuesday	martes (m.)
Wednesday	
Thursday	jueves (m.)
Friday	viernes (m.)
Saturday	

## Months of the Year

January	enero (m.)
February	febrero (m.)
March	marzo (m.)
April	abril (m.)
May	mayo (m.)
June	junio (m.)
July	julio (m.)
August	agosto (m.)
September	septiembre (m.)
·	. ,
	` ,
December	diciembre (m.)
October November	octubre (m.) noviembre (m.)

	Co	lors
white		blanco
black		negro
gray		gris
brown		café



red	rojo
pink	rosa
blue; dark blue	
green; light green	
purple	morado
yellow	

## **Useful Adjectives**

Note: These adjectives are in their masculine forms. End them with an "a" if you want the feminine form (except for grande, tarde and fácil, which are used for both genders).

bad	malo
high	alto
beautiful	bello
kind	bondadoso
cheap	barato
large	grande
clean	limpio
late	tarde
difficult	difícil
low	bajo
dirty	sucio
polite	cortés
early	temprano
sharp	agudo
easy	fácil
slow	lento
expensive	caro
small	pequeño
fast	rápido
ugly	feo
good	bueno
unkind	despiadado, duro
long	largo
short	corto
narrow	angosto
dangerous	peligroso

### **Numerals**

1. uno	8. ocho	15. quince	30. treinta	90. noventa
2. dos	9. nueve	16. diez y seis	31. treinta y uno	100. cien
3. tres	10. diez	17. diez y siete	40. cuarenta	200. doscientos
4. cuatro	11. once	18. diez y ocho	50. cincuenta	500. quinientos
5. cinco	12. doce	19. diez y nueve	60. sesenta	1,000. mil
6. seis	13. trece	20. veinte	70. setenta	1,000,000. un
7. siete	<ol><li>14. catorce</li></ol>	21. veintiuno	80. ochenta	millón

## **Points of the Compass**

north norte (m.)	south	sur (m.)	east	este (m.)	west	oeste (ı	m.)
------------------	-------	----------	------	-----------	------	----------	-----



Note: In addresses, east is oriente, abbreviated Ote.; west is poniente, abbreviated Pte.

## At the Border

passport	pasaporte
tourist card	tarjeta de turista
age	edad
marital status	estado civil
single	soltero
married	casado
widowed	viudo
divorced	divorciado
profession or occupation	profesión; ocupación
vaccination card	certificado de vacuna
car owner's title (registration)	título de propiedad (registro)
driver's license	licencia de manejar
year of car	modelo (o año)
make (Ford, Plymouth, etc.)	marca
license plate number and state	número y estado de placa
chassis and motor number	número de chasis y motor
number of doors	número de puertas
number of cylinders	número de cilindros
number of passengers	número de pasajeros

## On the Road

highway	carretera (f.)
road	camino (m.)
street	calle (f.)
avenue	avenida (f.)
boulevard	bulevar (m.)
corner	esquina (f.)
kilometer	kilómetro (m.)
block	cuadra (f.)
left side	lado izquierdo (m.)
right side	lado derecho (m.)
Please show me the road to	Enséñeme el camino a
How far is?	¿Qué tan lejos está ?
Can we get tobefore dark?	¿Podemos llegar aantes del anochecer?
Is this road dangerous?	¿Es peligroso este camino?
Is that road in good condition?	¿Está en buen estado ese camino?
Is it paved or is it a dirt road?	¿Está pavimentado o es de tierra?
Go straight ahead.	Siga adelante.
Turn to the right; left.	Vuelta a la derecha; izquierda.
What city, town, is this?	¿Qué ciudad, pueblo, es éste?
Where does this road lead?	¿A dónde va este camino?

## In Case of Car Trouble



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My car broke down	Se me descompuso el carro.
I need a tow truck.	
My lights don't work	•
My engine's overheating	Mi motor se está sobrecalentando.
I have run out of gasoline.	Se me acabó la gasolina.
Is there a gasoline station near here?	¿Hay alguna gasolinería cerca de aquí?
Is there a garage near here?	
Please send a mechanic.	
May I go with you to get a mechanic?	
Do you have a rope to tow my car?	
The starter does not work	
Can you help me push the car to one side of the road?	
, , ,	camino?
Do you want to be my witness?	¿Quiere ser mi testigo?
Do you want to help me change a tire?	
,	,
	ı in Town
Is English spoken here?	¿Se habla inglés aquí?
Where is the center of town?	¿Dónde está el centro de la ciudad?
May I park here?	¿Puedo estacionarme aquí?
Could you recommend a good restaurant; a good small	
hotel; a first class hotel?	¿Puede Ud. recomendar un buen restaurante; unbuen
	hotel pequeño; un hotel de primera clase?
Please direct me to the nearest post office	Por favor diríjame a la oficina de correos mas cercana.
I wish to telephone, to telegraph, to cable	Quiero telefonear, telegrafiar, cablegrafiar.
Please direct me to the railroad station, the bus station	Por favor diríjame a la estación del ferrocarril, a la
	estación del autobús.
Where is X Street, X Square, the X Hotel?	¿Dónde está la Calle X, la Plaza X, el Hotel X?
How often does the bus go by?	¿Que tan seguido pasa el autobús?
Does the streetcar stop here?	¿Para aquí el tranvía?
I wish to change some money	Quiero cambiar dinero.
What is the rate of exchange?	¿Cuál es el tipo de cambio?
I want to cash a check	Quiero cambiar un cheque.
I have lost my traveler's checks	He perdido mis cheques de viajero.
Where can I find a policeman, a hairdresser, a doctor, a	
drug store?	¿Dónde puedo hallar un policía, un peinador, un médico,
	una farmacia?
Where is the police station; the chamber of commerce;	
the automobile club?	¿Dónde está la comisaría, la cámara de comerciola
	asociación automovilística?
Where can I find guidebooks, road maps, postcards,	
American newspapers?	¿Dónde se pueden hallar guías turísticas, mapas de
	carreteras, tarjetas postales, periódicos norteamericanos?
At the	e Hotel



guesthouse	casa de huéspedes (f.)
apartment house	
furnished room	
stairway	escalera (f.)
bedroom	recámara (f.)
bathroom	cuarto de baño (m.)
kitchen	
towel	( )
washcloth	
soap	
air conditioning	
room	
hot water	
office	
elevator	` '
dining room	` '
guest	` '
manager	• • •
office employee	empleado de oficina
maid	•
key	
porter	mozo (m.) de servicios
bellboy	botones (m.)
ice water	agua con hielo
I want a single room, with bath	Deseo un cuarto para una persona, con baño
I want a room for two, with twin beds	
I want two connecting rooms	
On the lower floor; upper floor	
A front room; a back room	
Do you have hot running water?	
What is the price?	- • •
What is the minimum rate?	-
Do you accept checks in payment?	
Is there a garage?	
Please call me at six o'clock	• . • •
Where is the ladies' room, men's room?	•
Will you have the baggage brought up? down?	
We are leaving tomorrow	
We are staying several daysJust tonight	
vvo are staying several days	esta noche.
Please send these clothes to the laundry	
i loade della triede ciotried to trie fauriury	Hágame el favor de mandar esta ropa a la lavandería.
Please clean and press this suit	Hágame el favor de limpiar y planchar este traje.
Please clean and press this suit  I want it today; tomorrow	Hágame el favor de limpiar y planchar este traje. Lo quiero hoy; mañana.
Please clean and press this suit	Hágame el favor de limpiar y planchar este traje. Lo quiero hoy; mañana. ¿Dónde hay una peluquería?



Do you want to prepare a lunch for us to carry with us?.. ¿Quiere Ud. prepararnos un almuerzo para llevárnoslo?

## At the Garage

Fill up the gasoline tank; the radiator	Deme cinco, diez, quince, veinte litros. ¿Tiene gasolina sin plomo?
Check the oil; change the oil, antifreeze	Vea el aceite; cambie el aceite, anticongelante.
Please lubricate the car; wash the car	· · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · ·
Please tighten the brakes; adjust the brakes	•
Please tune the engine; change the spark plugs	
My tire has a puncture. Can you repair it?	
The tire is flat	
Put water in the battery.	
The horn is not working.	
The battery needs charging	
Please replace this headlamp	
the fan belt	
the radiator hose	•
The gas line is clogged	·
My engine's overheating	
The exhaust is choked	
The steering gear is out of order	La dirección está descompuesta.
The radiator leaks	El radiador gotea.
The clutch slips	
The gasoline tank is leaking	El tanque de gasolina está goteando.
There is a short circuit	
The windshield wiper does not work	El limpiavidrios del parabrisa no funciona.
The taillight does not work	La calavera no funciona.
The water pump does not work	
Please clean the windshield	Favor de limpiar el parabrisa.
When will the repairs be finished?	¿Cuándo terminará la reparación?
How much do I owe you?	¿Cuánto le debo?

#### In Restaurants

	III I 100taaranto
breakfast	desayuno (m).
lunch	almuerzo (m.)
midday meal	comida (f.)
dinner; supper	` ,
spoon	
cup	taza (f.)
glass	` '
napkin	
bill	cuenta (f.)
tip	propina (f.)
knife	
fork	tenedor (m )



Me	eat, Eggs, Fish
bacon	tocino (m.)
beef	carne (f.) de res (m.)
beefsteak	bistec (m.)
chicken	pollo (m.)
duck	pato (m.)
egg	huevo (m.)
fried	frito
soft-boiled	tibio
hard-boiled	duro
fish	pescado (m.)
ham	jamón (m.)
lamb	carne (f.) de carnero (m.)
lamb chops	chuletas (f.) de carnero (m.)
meat	carne (f.)
omelet	omelete de huevo (m.)
pork	carne (f.) de puerco (m.)
roast	asado (m.)
sausage	salchicha (f.)
turkey	guajolote (m.); pavo (m.)
veal	ternera (f.)
	Wa watahila a
colod	Vegetables
salad	
beans	,
beets	( )
cabbage	. , , , , ,
corn; young corn	, , , , , ,
lettuce	9 ( )
onion	( )
peas	` ,
potatoes	,
rice	,
string beans	• • •
sweet potatoes	, ,
tomatoes	, ,
vegetables	legumbres (f.); verduras (f.)
	Bread
bread	1 \ /
crackers	galletas (f.)
toast	pan tostado (m.)
Bev	erages, Liquors
beer	- (1)
brandy	
coffee	* ', ',
with cream	
	\ /



without cream	sin crema ginebra (f.) jugo (m.) leche (f.) ron (m.) té (m.) whisky (m.) vino de mesa (m.)
Sw	veets
dessert	postre (m.)
sweet rolls	pan dulce (m.)
cake	pastel (m.)
candies	dulces (m.)
cookies	galletas (f.)
custard	flan (m.)
ice cream	helado (m.)
sherbets	nieves (f.)
pastries	pasteles (m.)
pie	pastel (m.)
	s, Nuts
apple	` ,
avocado	aguacate (m.)
banana	plátano (m.)
cantaloupe	melón (m.)
figs	higos (m.)
fruit	fruta (f.)
grapes	uvas (f.)
guava	guayaba (f.)
grapefruit	toronja (f.)
lemon	limón amarillo (m.)
lime (sweet)	limón (m.)
nuts	nueces (f.)
olives	aceitunas (f.)
orange	naranja (f.)
peach	durazno (m.)
peanuts	cacahuates (m.)
pecans	nueces (f.)
pineapple	piña (f.)
strawberries	fresas (f.)
walnut	nuez (f.) de castilla
watermelon	sandía (f.)
Misce	llaneous
sugar	azúcar (m.)
salt	sal (f.)
pepper	pimienta (f.)



butter	mantequilla (f.)
soup; broth	sopa (f.); caldo (m.)
cheese	queso (m.)
honey	miel de abejas (f.)
cigarette; cigar	cigarrillo (m.); puro (m.)
Please bring me the menu	Por favor tráigame el menú.
I like my meat rare, medium, well done	Quiero la carne roja, término medio, bien cocida



## Fiestas and Holidays

NOTE: The dates listed here for local celebrations are often variable and may be moved forward or back when the fiesta must be celebrated on a specific day of the week or time of the month or year. Confirm dates in advance with your hotel, at a local tourist information office or at city hall.

## **National Holidays**

All banks and most businesses close on these days.

Feb. 5 Constitution Day (Día de la Constitución) commemorates the Constitutions of 1857 and 1917.

Mar. 21 Birthday of Benito Juárez, Mexican president and national hero.

May 1 Labor Day (Primero de Mayo) is celebrated throughout the country and features workers' parades.

May 5 Battle of Puebla (Batalla de Puebla), commonly known as Cinco de Mayo, commemorates the Mexican

victory over invading French forces at Puebla in 1862.

June 1 Navy Day

Sept. 1 The president delivers the annual State of the Union Address (Informe Presidencial).

Sept. 16 Mexican Independence Day (Día de la Independencia). The president presides at the ceremony of the

*Grito de Dolores* in Mexico City's *Zócalo*, or sometimes at the parish church in Dolores Hidalgo, Guanajuato, where Father Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla gave a speech in 1810 proclaiming independence. Special

celebrations take place in each state capital and start the night of Sept. 15.

Oct. 12 Discovery of the New World by Christopher Columbus, known as Día de la Raza (Day of the Race).

**Dec. 25** Christmas Day (Navidad). Plays, religious ceremonies.

#### Fiestas and Fairs in Mexico

The following fiestas and holiday periods are celebrated in many parts of the country.

Jan. 6 Day of the Three Kings (Día de los Santos Reyes) features an exchange of gifts in accordance with the

three gift-bearing wise men and is the culmination of Christmas festivities. This also is the day when *Rosca de Los Reyes* (King's Loaf) is served. The round, doughnut-like cake has a plastic doll inside; if you are served the slice containing the doll, tradition says you must host a party on Candlemas Day.

Jan. 17 Feast Day of San Antonio de Abad (St. Anthony's Day). San Antonio Abad, the patron saint of animals,

is honored during this religious holiday. The highlight is the blessing of the animals; farmers and townspeople bring livestock and pets—from dogs and cats to iguanas and roosters—to the local parish church

to be blessed by the priest.

Feb. (varies) Carnaval begins the weekend before Lent and is exuberantly celebrated with parades, floats and

dancing in the streets. It's especially festive in port cities like Ensenada, La Paz, Mazatlán and Veracruz.

Feb. 2 Candlemas (Día de la Candelaria) celebrates the passing of winter with processions, dancing, music

and food.

Mar. 19 St. Joseph's Day (Día de San José). This feast day is dedicated to the husband of the Virgin Mary. Bread

crumbs, symbolizing Joseph's profession as a carpenter, are often incorporated into dishes prepared for

the celebration.

Palm Sunday to Easter Sunday Holy Week (Semana Santa). Particularly impressive are the candlelight processions in Taxco and the Processions of Silence in San Luis Potosí and San Miguel de Allende. The country's most famous Passion Play, or re-enactment of the crucifixion of Christ, has been performed since 1833 in Iztapalapa, part

of the Mexico City metropolitan area; thousands of local residents take part in this dramatic presenta-

tion, which is attended by more than a million spectators.



- Holy Saturday

  (Sábado de Gloria). On "Judas Day," papier-mâché effigies representing Judas are stuffed with fire-crackers and burned the day before Easter Sunday. The figure can also be in the form of a living person, especially an unpopular local official or politician. This tradition is popular in southern Mexico. Statues of Mary are often covered in black dresses, symbolizing her mourning.

  Holy Cross Day (Día de la Santa Cruz). Processions of bricklayers, masons and other construction workers carry crosses decorated with streamers and crepe paper flowers. The festivities also include food, drink and fireworks.

  June 24
- June 24 Saint John the Baptist Day (Día de San Juan Bautista) is celebrated with fairs, religious services and crowd-pleasing spectacles in which participants get dunked in water.
- **Aug. 15** Feast Day of the Assumption (Día de la Asunción). Carpets of flowers adorn the streets for processions and special masses devoted to the Virgin Mary. This event is especially significant in Huamantla, Tlaxcala, where it lasts for nearly 2 weeks and culminates in a running of the bulls through the city streets.
- Oct. 4 Feast Day of St. Francis of Assisi. The founder of the Franciscan order is honored at solemn church services and also with rollicking parades, music and fireworks.
- Nov. 1-2

  Day of the Dead (Día de Los Muertos). This 2-day religious festival, observed throughout Mexico, is marked by visits to cemeteries to remember and honor loved ones, flower and culinary offerings, candle-light vigils, elaborately decorated home altars and celebratory nighttime processions. It is especially impressive on Janitzio Island in Lake Pátzcuaro and the town of Pátzcuaro, as well as in the cities of Oaxaca, Mérida and Chiapa de Corzo, Chiapas.
- Nov. 20 Revolution Day (Día de la Revolución). The anniversary of the Mexican Revolution of 1910 is commemorated with official ceremonies.
- **Dec. 8**Feast of the Immaculate Conception (Inmaculada Concepción de María). Special masses honoring the Virgin Mary are held during this religious celebration. It is observed in many Mexican cities and towns but is a particularly noteworthy event in San Juan de los Lagos, Jalisco, where street festivals feature food and candy stands, puppet shows, games and live music.
- Pec. 12

  Feast Day of the Virgin of Guadalupe (Día de la Virgen de Guadalupe). This festival, which pays tribute to the Guadalupe Virgin, is Mexico's largest religious pilgrimage. It has special significance in Mexico City, where devoted Catholics come to the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe to pray and view an image of the Virgin, but celebrations take place throughout the country.
- **Dec. 16-Jan. 6** Las Posadas. A candlelit procession ending at a nativity scene is part of the re-enactment of Mary and Joseph's search for shelter in Bethlehem. These processions take place throughout the country, and some of the programs are quite impressive.
- Dec. 31 New Year's Eve and Thanksgiving (Fin de Año y Día de Gracias). The party is especially vibrant in Mexico City, where empty eggshells filled with confetti and food coloring are tossed into the air.

#### Other Selected Local Festivals and Events

- Jan. 18 Taxco, Guerrero. Day of Santa Prisca. A tribute to the patron saint begins with parishioners singing early morning wake-up songs *(mañanitas)*. Celebrations and dancing continue throughout the day.
- Feb. 3 San Blas, Nayarit. Blessing of the Sea. Saint Blas, the patron saint of hunters, is celebrated on a day that begins with *mañanitas* and includes performances by dancers in regional costumes, a flower-adorned boat, a waterside shrimp boat procession, a beachside mass and evening fireworks.
- Late Mar.-early Tonalá, Jalisco. Ceramics Fair (Feria de la Cerámica). Taking place the week Apr. Ceramics Fair (Feria de la Cerámica). Taking place the week before and the week after Easter, this event features artisans selling handicrafts and colorfully painted ceramics.

## 444 FIESTAS AND HOLIDAYS

Apr. 25-28	Tuxtla Gutiérrez, Chiapas.	St. Mark's Fair (Feria de San Marcos). Honoring St. Mark the Evangelist, the city's patron saint, this celebration includes pilgrimages to St. Mark's Cathedral, theatrical presentations and nighttime fireworks.
Apr. (last week)	Villahermosa, Tabasco.	Tabasco State Fair. People from throughout the state gather to listen to music and watch regional dance and folkloric ballet performances. The festivities take place at Parque La Choca.
Late May-early June	Tequisquiapan, Querétaro.	National Wine and Cheese Festival. This festival offers tastings of locally produced cheeses and wines from regional wineries, as well as wines from Chile, France, Italy and Spain. Other activities include lectures, workshops and cooking competitions.
June (1st Thurs.)	Temascalcingo, Mêxico.	Corpus Christi Day. Festivities include the blessing of farm animals and performances by elaborately costumed dancers.
Mid-June	Tlaquepaque, Jalisco.	National Ceramics Fair (Premio Nacional de la Cerámica). Ceramic artisans from all over Mexico vie for cash awards in juried competitions. The winning pieces become part of a museum collection, while the other works are exhibited and sold.
June 18	Papantla, Veracruz.	Vanilla Festival. Papantla is located in Mexico's largest vanilla-producing region, and the festival celebrates the flowering vine from which vanilla flavoring is derived. Booths sell regional food, beverages and baskets woven from vanilla bean pods, and dancers (including the famous Papantla Flying Pole troupe) perform.
June 29	Zaachila, Oaxaca.	Fiesta of St. Peter and St. Paul. The two saints are honored in festivities that include dance performances and the enactment of pre-Hispanic rituals.
July 25	Santiago Tuxtla, Veracruz.	Day of St. James the Apostle. Traditional dances performed include the Liseres, in which participants don jaguar costumes, and the Negritos.
Late July to mid-Aug.	Santa Ana Chiautempan, Tlaxcala.	National Sarape Fair (Feria Nacional del Sarape). The fair pays tribute to the rectangular shawl that is one of Mexico's best-known textile products. In addition to sarape exhibits there are parades and regional dance performances. It takes place simultaneously with the celebration of the town's patron saint on July 26.
Aug. (variable)	Santa Clara del Cobre, Michoacán.	National Copper Fair (Feria Nacional del Cobre). Santa Clara del Cobre is famous for its handmade copper products and artwork. Regional craftsmen display their wares and compete in a copper hammering competition.
Sept. (first half)	Cholula, Puebla.	Cholula Town Fair (Feria de Cholula). Cholula's main plaza is the site of this huge celebration saluting the region's past and present cultural heritage. It kicks off with an inaugural dance and the coronation of a festival queen and includes everything from carnival rides, live entertainment, and street food and handicraft vendors to a re-enactment of Father Miguel Hidalgo's <i>Grito de Dolores</i> speech and an Independence Day parade on Sept. 15.

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**Late Oct.-early** Aguascalientes, Aguascalientes. **Nov.** 

Festival of the Skulls (Festival de las Calaveras). Held in conjunction with Day of the Dead observances, this festival takes place at the city fairgrounds and includes handicraft exhibits, food stands, theatrical productions and live music. The highlight is a downtown parade with participants decked out in skull-inspired makeup and costumes.

Nov. (late) Monterrey, Nuevo León.

Festival Cultural del Barrio Antiguo. Concerts, live performances and art exhibitions take place at various venues in the city's Barrio Antiguo ("Old Town") neighborhood.



## **Border Information**

# Traveling to Mexico FOR U.S. AND CANADIAN RESIDENTS TRAVELING TO MEXICO

AAA recommends that travelers consult U.S. State Department travel advisories when planning travel abroad. Find this information online at https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/traveladvisories/traveladvisories/mexico-travel-advisory.html.

**Border crossing requirements:** Travelers are required to present proper travel documents for travel to Mexico and to return to the United States.

**Air travel:** U.S. and Canadian citizens traveling between the United States and Mexico by air are required to show a valid passport.



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Land or sea travel: A passport or passport card, or other U.S. official ID (not including a state-issued driver's license), is required to enter Mexico by land or sea. U.S. citizens returning to the United States from Mexico by land or sea are required to present proper travel documents according to the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative. Approved documents include a passport or passport card, Enhanced Driver's License or Trusted Traveler program card; for more information refer to the U.S. Department of State website. Canadian citizens should refer to the Canada Border Services Agency website for requirements to re-enter Canada; cbsa-asfc.gc.ca.

Children: Minors under age 18 traveling alone or with someone other than a parent or legal guardian are required to present a notarized letter of consent from at least one absent parent giving permission to travel only if the minor is departing (not entering) Mexico, is traveling by air or sea or is using Mexican documents to travel. However, because airline or Mexican immigration officials may request a notarized letter of consent under other circumstances as well, the U.S. Embassy in Mexico City recommends that any minor traveling without both parents carry a notarized consent letter at all times. For more information contact the embassy, a Mexican consulate office or the Mexican National Immigration Institute (INM).

**Automobile insurance:** Full coverage from a reliable Mexican insurance company is required, including property damage and public liability. AAA offices in border states, Nevada and Utah can provide Mexican automobile insurance to members. U.S. or Canadian automobile insurance is not valid in Mexico.

**Tourist permits:** When traveling to Mexico as a tourist you must obtain an FMM tourist permit. A valid passport or passport card is required in order to obtain a permit.

Permits are issued online and at Mexican immigration offices at official points of entry. You must have a valid tourist permit if you remain within



the border zone—the area within 20 to 30 kilometers (12 to 19 miles) of the U.S. border, depending on the Mexican state—for more than 72 hours, or if you travel beyond the border zone. **Note:** In the state of Baia California the border "free zone" is no longer valid and every visitor must have a tourist permit regardless of the length of his or her stay.

The permit costs 500 pesos (approximately \$26.32) U.S.), which must be paid at a Mexican bank (see the list of banks on the back of the permit form) or at a bank window at the border. You are required to show the "Fee Paid" stamp on your tourist permit when leaving Mexico.

If traveling by air, the permit is distributed on the flight and the fee is included in the airline ticket price. If arriving by cruise ship, the fee is collected when disembarking or is included in the cruise fare if the stay is longer than 72 hours.

#### Tourist permit exemptions:

- Visitors traveling by sea, staying less than 72 hours and remaining in the seaport.
- Visitors traveling by land to destinations within the border zone (except Baja California) and staying less than 72 hours.
- Visitors traveling by land beyond the border zone, staying less than 72 hours and limiting their visit to the following destinations/tourist corridors: Sonovta to Puerto Peñasco, Sonora; Ciudad Juárez to Paguime, Chihuahua; Piedras Negras to Santa Rosa, Coahuila; and Revnosa to Presa Cuchillo. Nuevo León.
- Business travelers with a business visa: students (as defined by Mexican immigration laws) with a student visa (contact a Mexican consulate for business/student visa information).

## Tourist permit validity:

- The permit is valid for up to 180 days.
- A multiple-entry permit allows unlimited visits into and out of Mexico within the 180-day period.
- A tourist permit not used within 90 days of issue becomes void.
- Visitors should carry their tourist permit with them at all times while in Mexico.
- If you lose your permit while in Mexico, a duplicate can be obtained from a local immigration office (write down your tourist permit number and keep it separate from the permit to expedite the paperwork involved).

- Permits must be turned in to Mexican immigration officials at the border when you depart the country by land, except in Baja California (following the permit expiration date it can be shredded or discarded). If departing by air, the permit must be turned in to immigration officials at the airport.
- If you wish to remain in Mexico beyond the permit validity period an extension must be requested from immigration authorities prior to the expiration date.
- Violation of the laws governing tourist permits may result in subsequently being refused entry into Mexico and/or incurring a substantial fine.

Vehicle travel beyond the border zone requires a government-issued temporary vehicle importation permit and a promise to return vehicle form. These two documents are not required in Baja California unless the vehicle is put on a ferry bound for the mainland. They also are not required for travel to the following destinations in the state of Sonora: Rocky Point (Puerto Peñasco), Guaymas, San Carlos, Bahía Kino and other locations west of Mex. 15. as well as cities along Mex. 15. (Magdalena, Santa Ana, Hermosillo).

An Only Sonora permit is acceptable if driving is confined within the state east of Mex. 15 as well as south of Empalme (about 350 miles south of the U.S. border). The permit can be obtained at Baniercito offices in Agua Prieta (opposite Douglas, Ariz.), Cananea (on Mex. 2 southwest of Agua Prieta) and Empalme (on Mex. 15 at Km marker 98, just south of the Guaymas bypass).

The temporary vehicle importation permit and promise to return vehicle form can be purchased at the Baniercito office at an official point of entry (immigration checkpoint). The vehicle owner must present a valid (unexpired) tourist permit and a current vehicle license/registration receipt (the original and two copies). Information on the application for temporary vehicle importation and on the promise to return form must match; the same requirements apply to both.

An administration fee (approximately \$51 U.S.) plus applicable IVA tax must be paid with a major international credit card (American Express. Mastercard or Visa) in order to receive a temporary importation permit windshield sticker. The credit



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card must be in the vehicle owner's name and issued by a U.S. or Canadian bank or lending institution. Vehicle owners who don't have a major credit card must post a bond (\$200 to \$400 based on vehicle value) with a Mexican bonding firm (Afianzadora) at the point of entry. Cash, checks, money orders or credit cards issued by a Mexican bank are not accepted.

#### More about temporary importation permits:

- Generally issued for 180 days, the same length as the tourist permit.
- Only one permit will be issued per person, for one motorized vehicle at a time.
- Carry the permit with you; do not leave it in the vehicle.
- Return permit, promise to return vehicle form and windshield sticker to Mexican customs officials at the Banjercito office at the border before or on the expiration date shown on the form, or be subject to a fine.
- If the permit or form is lost or stolen, Mexican customs offices can issue replacement documentation provided



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- you obtain a certified document attesting to the loss from your homeland (U.S. or Canada) embassy or consulate.
- If you remain in Mexico beyond the authorized time period and without the proper documentation, your car will be immediately confiscated.

**Pets:** U.S. visitors may bring a dog, cat or bird into Mexico with government approval. A pet health certificate signed not more than 15 days before the animal enters Mexico and a pet vaccination certificate showing proof of treatment for rabies, hepatitis and leptospirosis are required at the border for each animal. A pet permit fee is charged at the time of entry.

## **Leaving Mexico**

## FOR U.S. AND CANADIAN RESIDENTS LEAVING MEXICO

#### When leaving the country:

- FMM tourist permits, temporary vehicle importation permits, promise to return vehicle forms and windshield stickers must be returned to Mexican immigration and customs officials at the departure or border checkpoint (or at an interior inspection point).
- Those entering Mexico with a motor vehicle must leave the country with the vehicle.
- At highway stations near the U.S. border, Mexican agricultural officials will inspect vehicles traveling north that are carrying any fruits, vegetables, houseplants and other plant matter.
- You must have an export certificate to take official cultural artifacts (excluding handicrafts) out of the country.
- Religious or archeological artifacts may not be taken out of the country.

## Returning to the United States or Canada:

U.S. citizens returning from Mexico by land or sea are required to present proper travel documents; refer to the U.S. Department of State website for the most current information. Canadian citizens entering the United States are subject to the rules governing entry to the U.S. by foreign nationals; refer to the Canadian Border Services Agency website for requirements to re-enter Canada.

## U.S. exemptions:

 You may bring back duty-free articles not exceeding \$800 in retail value.



- The exemption is allowed once every 30 days.
- A family (related persons living in the same household) may combine exemptions; i.e., a family of six would be entitled to \$1,600 worth of goods duty-free on one declaration, even if the articles claimed by one member exceed that individual's \$800 amount.
- Duty must be paid on all items in excess of the exemption amount.
- · Payment of duty is required upon arrival.
- Gifts taken across the U.S./Mexico border are considered to be for personal use and are included in the \$800 exemption.
- Articles purchased and left behind for alterations or other reasons do not qualify for the \$800 exemption when shipped at a later date.
- The \$800 exemption may include no more than 1 liter of alcoholic beverages and no more than 200 cigarettes and 100 cigars.

Restricted or prohibited articles: An agricultural guarantine bans the importation of certain fruits. vegetables, plants, livestock, poultry and meats. All food products brought into the United States must be declared. The U.S. Department of Agriculture also prohibits bringing back any type of pet. Visit the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) website or U.S. Customs at cbp.gov for more information.

One foreign-made article carrying a protected U.S. trademark (i.e., camera, binoculars, musical instrument, jewelry or watch) may normally be brought into the United States under your personal exemption, provided it is for your private use and not sold within 1 year of importation.

The following are prohibited: narcotics and dangerous drugs, drug paraphernalia, obscene articles and publications, seditious or treasonable matter, lottery tickets, hazardous items (fireworks, dangerous toys, toxic or poisonous substances) and switchblade knives. Merchandise originating in the embargoed countries of Angola, Burma (Myanmar), Cuba, Libera and Sudan is prohibited.

If you plan to bring back items made of fur or whalebone, any animal skin other than cowhide leather, or any product manufactured wholly or in part from any type of wildlife, contact the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service regarding regulations; phone (800) 358-210.

Alcoholic beverages: Both federal and state laws apply. If regulations conflict, state laws regarding import limits supersede.

U.S. residents 21 years of age or older may bring into the United States 1 liter of alcohol duty-free once every 30 days. However, if you arrive in a state that permits a lesser amount than what you have legally brought into the United States, state law prevails.

Gifts: Gifts in packages with a total retail value not exceeding \$100 may be sent to friends or relatives in the United States free of U.S. customs duty or tax, provided no recipient receives more than one gift shipment per day. Gifts may be sent to more than one person in the same package if they are individually wrapped and labeled with each recipient's name. Perfumes containing alcohol and valued at more than \$5 retail, tobacco products or alcoholic beverages may not be included in gift packages, which should be clearly marked with the designation "Unsolicited Gift," the gift giver's name and the retail value of the contents.

**Duties:** A flat rate duty of 3 percent is applied to the first \$1,000 (fair retail value) worth of merchandise in excess of the \$800 customs exemption. A sales receipt constitutes proof of value. Family members residing in one household and traveling together may group articles for application of the flat-duty rate, which may be taken once every 30 days. Articles must accompany you to the U.S. border.

Canadian exemptions: Canadian citizens who have been outside Canada 24 hours or more may bring back duty- and tax-free goods up to \$200 (CAN) in retail value, and up to \$800 (CAN) in retail value if outside Canada 48 hours or more. Goods must be in the traveler's possession at the time of entry into Canada. Citizens who have been outside Canada 7 days or more also may bring back duty- and tax-free goods up to \$800 (CAN) in retail value; goods may be in the traveler's possession and also are permitted to follow entry into Canada via courier, mail or delivery agency (except alcohol and tobacco products).



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Items brought into Canada under a personal exemption must be for personal or household use, souvenirs or gifts.

Canadian limitations (on either the \$200 or \$800 exemption): 50 cigars, 200 cigarettes, 200 tobacco sticks, 200 grams (6.4 ounces) of tobacco, 40 ounces (1.1 liters, or one large standard bottle) of liquor, 53 fluid ounces of wine (two bottles) and 287 ounces (8.5 liters) of beer or ale (equivalent to 24 12-ounce bottles/cans).

All exemptions are individual and may not be combined with that of another person to cover an article valued at more than the maximum exemption. You may be asked to prove the length of your visit outside Canada. Dated sales receipts for goods or services constitute valid proof.

While AAA makes every effort to provide accurate and complete information, AAA makes no warranty, express or implied, and assumes no legal liability or responsibility for the accuracy or completeness of any information contained herein.





INTERNATIONAL DRIVING PERMI



Before you go, purchase an International Driving Permit for a recognizable form of identification, even if you're not driving.

Translated into 10 languages, the IDP is valid in more than 150 countries — mandatory in some and highly recommended in others.

U.S. residents apply at AAA offices. Canadian residents apply at CAA offices.

Or visit us online at: AAA.com/IDP or CAA.ca/services/travel