

# Mexico, Guatemala and Honduras

Departs 3rd February 2020

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## MEXICO, GUATEMALA AND HONDURAS

Mexico is the world's largest Spanish-speaking country and with 130 million, ranks as the eleventh most populous nation. Pre-Columbian Mexico dates to about 8,000 BC and is identified as one of five cradles of civilisation. Home to many advanced Mesoamerican civilisations such as the Olmec, Toltec, Teotihuacan, Zapotec, Mayan, and Aztec before first contact with Europeans. In 1521, the Spanish Empire conquered and colonised the territory from its politically powerful base in Mexico-Tenochtitlan (part of Mexico City). Three centuries later, the territory became a nation state following its recognition in 1821 after the Mexican War of Independence. Mexicans are some of the friendliest people you'll ever meet. Eager to share their wealth of history and abundant culture with anyone interested, they are truly a wonderful people. Sadly, many travellers will skip Mexico entirely due to its reputation, which is entirely unfair.

Our tour of Mexico starts in Mexico City and then moves south east taking in the UNESCO heritage sites of Monte Alban, the greatest of the Zapotec cities, Teotihuacan, the most sacred of the Aztec sites and the Mayan sites of Palenque, Uxmal and Chichen Itza. We will savour some wonderful Mexican food and music, visit a mezcal distillery, travel by boat down the Sumidero Canyon and end up in the Yucatan Peninsula on the Caribbean coast before we fly on to Guatemala.

With 65% of its population Mayan Indian, Guatemala is Central America's most indigenous nation. This fact delivers a very rich cultural heritage. It's a relatively small country at just 110,000 square kilometres and is bordered by Mexico, Honduras, Belize and El Salvador. It has unique ecosystem attracting scientists and "green" travellers from all around the world. Regular seismic activity is due to the 33 volcanoes on the Pacific Rim. The first evidence of civilisation dates back 10,000 years, but it is best known for its Mayan culture of around 300 AD. One of Guatemala's highlights has to be the traditional market of Chichicastenango (meaning place of poison ivy). The colours, the people, the produce is a must see.

While we only spend a few nights in Honduras, you will have the privilege of enjoying one of the great archaeological sites of the Mayans – The Ruins of Copan. So sophisticated was this ancient city, it later became known as the Paris of the Mayan Empire.

Join us on this fascinating cultural mix of history, beautiful scenery and wonderful food.



**Day 1, Monday 3rd February**  
**DEPART AUSTRALIA FOR MEXICO CITY**

We depart Australia today with Qantas for our over night flight to Mexico city. After transiting through Dallas, USA we will arrive in Mexico city and check into our hotel for the next three nights. We will have our welcome dinner tonight in the hotel. *Meals in flight/D*

**Day 2, Tuesday 4th February**  
**MEXICO CITY**

After our long flight yesterday, we start our tour of Mexico with the magnificent Mexico City. Built on top of the Aztec ruins of Tenochtitlan, Mexico City is now one of the world's largest metropolis and oldest urban centre in the Western Hemisphere. Our first stop is the Zocalo (main square), one of the biggest public squares in the world. We will visit the Catedral Metropolitana – the biggest church in Latin America, and the Palacio Nacional – which hosts Diego Rivera's murals depicting the history of Mexico. We continue to a handicraft market, where we will have time for some browsing. We then visit the National Museum of Anthropology which contains one of the worlds largest collections of archaeological and anthropological artefacts from pre-hispanic Mayan civilisations to the Spanish conquest. In the afternoon, we visit Coyoacan, a former colonial village, located in the south of Mexico City. Coyoacan still has its own identity, with narrow colonial-era streets, plazas, cafes and a lively bohemian atmosphere. A highlight of any visit to Coyoacan is a visit Frida Kahlo's home, where she was born, lived much of her life, and eventually died. The house is a treasure trove, not only

of her paintings, but also of innumerable artefacts associated with her and her husband, famous muralist Diego Rivera. *B/L/D*

**Day 3, Wednesday 5th February**  
**TEOTIHUACAN PYRAMIDS**

After breakfast we will drive to the impressive archaeological site of Teotihuacan, located 50 km northeast of Mexico City. On the way we will make a stop at the Plaza de las Tres Culturas, where three cultures converge: Aztec, Spanish, and contemporary Mexican. We



continue to the Basílica of Guadalupe, Latin America's most revered religious shrine. It is here where the Virgin of Guadalupe is said to have appeared before an Indian named Juan Diego in 1531, and an image of her was miraculously emblazoned on his cloak. We then continue driving for another hour to Teotihuacan, one of the most impressive cities of the ancient world, held sacred by the Aztecs. We will explore its temples, palaces and pyramids, including the Quetzalpapalotl Palace Complex, the Temple of the Feathered Conches, the Pyramid of the Moon, and the immense Pyramid of the Sun, ranked among the biggest in the world. *B/L/D*





**Day 4, Thursday  
6th February  
OAXACA**

Today we farewell Mexico City and head south for Oaxaca, located in a valley surrounded by the Sierra Madre del Sur, which

was once the centre of the Mixtec and Zapotec civilisations. Today's Oaxaca is a combination of pre-conquest, colonial and modern influences. The early Zapotecs developed a great civilisation at nearby Monte Alban centuries before the birth of Christ. After the Spanish conquered Oaxaca in 1533, the city quickly took on a Spanish flavour, with ornate buildings, churches, elegant archways, balconies, decorative grill work and charming plazas. Yet despite its colonial heritage, the city remains basically Amerindian at heart, wherein lies its charm. We stay at our hotel in Oaxaca for the next three nights. *B/L/D*

**Day 5, Friday 7th February  
MONTE ALBAN & OAXACA CITY**

This morning we will visit Monte Alban – a World Heritage Site – spectacularly situated on a mountain 400 metres above the Oaxaca Valley, a few kilometres west of Oaxaca. Monte Alban is the greatest of the Zapotec cities, and it came to dominate the cultural, religious, and economic life of the region. It is also a triumph of engineering; the mountain top was levelled to allow for the creation of the ceremonial site. We will explore the Gran Plaza, the Ball Court, the Observatory, the Palace, and other beautiful structures. After the Spaniards



conquered Oaxaca in 1533, the city quickly took on a Spanish flavour, with ornate buildings and charming plazas. Yet despite its colonial heritage, the city remains Indian at heart, due to the presence of a

large indigenous population. We will walk through the streets of the colonial city centre, along the Cathedral – with its attractive baroque facade, the Iglesia de Santo. Afterwards we will have time to browse the colourful local markets, and soak up the bustling atmosphere on the Zocalo main square. *B/L/D*

**Day 6, Saturday 8th February  
MITLA**

Today we will visit the Tule Tree "Arbol del Tule", one of the world's largest trees in the world and thought to be over 2,000 years, after that we will continue to the archaeological site of Mitla, located 46km southeast of Oaxaca. Mitla was an important Zapotec city after the decline of Monte Alban, and it was later occupied by the Mixtecs. Many of Mitla's temples were destroyed by the Spanish, and the stones were used to build the Iglesia de San Pablo, the Catholic church that dominates the site. We will explore the beautiful buildings with their

unique geometric stone mosaics, and the church in their midst. On our way back to Oaxaca we will stop at a distillery for mezcal tasting and to watch the elaborate process and enjoy a tasting! *B/L/D*

**Day 7, Sunday 9th February  
SAN CRISTOBAL DE LAS CASAS**

This morning we transfer to the airport for the flight to Tuxtla Gutierrez the capital of Chiapas state. Upon arrival we take a two-hour drive to San Cristobal de las Casas which is a characteristically indigenous Chiapaneca town nestled in the heart of the jungle highlands. En route we'll take a boat trip around the Sumidero Canyon followed by lunch. We will then continue onto San Cristobal - the tropical heat and plant life prevalent in Tuxtla Gutierrez gradually give way to the nippy mountain air and pine forests that surround San Cristobal, where days are sunny and warm, and nights may be chilly. Amber, the translucent stone derived from fossilised coniferous resin, is plentiful in the region, and attractive shops in town display creative jewellery fashioned out of silver and the ancient rock. We have one night in San Cristobal. *B/L/D*

**Day 8, Monday  
10th February  
SAN CRISTOBAL  
DE LAS CASAS  
CITY TOUR &  
PALENQUE**

A half day today to explore on foot the colonial city centre of San Cristobal.



We will visit the cathedral, on the north side of the pretty main square, with its lavish interior and gold-encrusted pulpit. We then walk a few blocks to the impressive 16th-century Dominican church Templo de Santo Domingo, with its intricate pink facade and gilded Baroque interior. Time to browse the handicraft market in front of the church, where Tzotzil Indians from the surrounding hills come to trade. After lunch we will drive to the foothills of the Tumbala Mountains where the ancient Mayan site of Palenque is located. We stay in Palenque for one night. *B/L/D*

**Day 9, Tuesday 11th February  
PALENQUE & CAMPECHE**

Today we visit today the archaeological site of Palenque, a World Heritage Site. The elegance and craftsmanship of the buildings, as well as the lightness of the sculpted reliefs with their Mayan mythological themes, attest to the creative genius of this civilisation. It was the flood plain of the Usumacinta river that most likely provided Palenque's inhabitants with the resources to construct their extraordinary city. Blessed with the highest average rainfall in Mexico, this fertile alluvial plain could have been successfully farmed with raised beds, and would have produced a harvest that not only could sustain a large workforce but would also have provided an abundance that could be traded along the Usumacinta. It seems that the gods were as enchanted with Palenque as today's visitors. Palenque flourished between AD600 and 800, when its influence extended throughout the basin of the Usumacinta river. The site, surrounded by

rainforest where toucans and howler monkeys live, is made up of some 500 buildings spread over 15 sq km, of which only a few have been excavated. We will explore the magnificent ruins, including the Temple of the Inscriptions – the tallest and most stately of Palenque's buildings, the Temple of the Sun – crowned with a prominent roof comb, The Palace – with its maze of corridors and rooms, and many other beautiful buildings. This afternoon we drive onto Campeche which was a principal sea port on the Yucatán Peninsula from the 16th to the 18th centuries where we will stay for one night. *B/L/D*

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**Day 10, Wednesday 12th February  
UXMAL & MERIDA**

We leave our hotel today and head for Mérida, visiting the archaeological site of Uxmal on the way. Uxmal's architecture is characterised by low horizontal palaces set around courtyards, decorated with a profusion of symbolic motifs and sculptures depicting the long-nosed rain god Chaac. We will explore the magnificent buildings, including the House of the Magician – which dominates the site, the Nunnery, and the House of Turtles. Tonight we stay in Merida which was built more than 450 years ago on the site of T'ho, an ancient Mayan city. Today Merida is the social and economic centre, as well as the capital, of the state of Yucatan. We stay in Merida for one night. *B/L/D*

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**Day 11, Thursday 13th February  
CHICHEN ITZA & CANCUN**

One of the key highlights of the tour will be our visit today to the archaeological site of Chichen Itza – one of the New 7 Wonders of the World – it is the best restored of Yucatan's Mayan sites. We will explore the magnificent ruins set in a dense jungle, including the Pyramid of Kukulcan – its height and striking geometric design dominating the whole site, the Great Ball Court – the largest and most impressive in Mesoamerica, the Sacred Cenote – a natural well used for human sacrifice, and many other beautiful temples. We will visit the Cenote (sinkhole) Ik Kil which is located near the site, this cenote is open to the sky adorned with vegetation surface, from where we can see the depth, the descent is by a stone staircase where we will find some balconies that allow us to admire the beauty from different points. This afternoon we make our way to Cancun to soak up the Caribbean. We stay in Cancun for one night. *B/L/D*



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**WELCOME TO  
GUATEMALA**

**Day 12, Friday 14th  
February  
CANCUN TO  
ANTIGUA**

This morning we say goodbye to Mexico and leave early for the airport for our

flight to Guatemala City. Upon landing, we transfer to the beautiful township of Antigua. On route, we will have a short visit to two museums – Popol Vuh for its Mayan Art and Ixchel Mayan museum for its textiles. We will check

in to the hotel Posada de don Rodrigo for two nights, and have dinner at a local restaurant. *B/D*

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**Day 13, Saturday 15th February  
ANTIGUA**

Our tour guide will meet us at our hotel reception to begin our half day walking tour of Antigua. The tour will cover the highlights of the colonial city, which include San Francisco Church, the Cathedral, Central Park and La Merced Church. Then in the afternoon, we'll take a short transfer to the small town of San Miguel Escobar, just outside of Antigua. You will be met in town by a local guide from De La Gente, a charity working to support small independent coffee producers and promoting environmentally responsible agriculture in Guatemala. This tour takes you to visit some of the families supported by this organisation where you can see what they do and how they live. *B/L/D*

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**Day 14, Sunday  
16th February  
LAKE ATITLAN**

After breakfast, we will be met at our hotel and transfer 3 hours to the Lake Atitlan via the town of Comalapa. Upon arrival we will be



able to see the famous painted mural that the school children of the town painted depicting major events in Guatemala's history up to the signing of the peace accords in 1996. We will also visit some local painters who continue the tradition of naïf paintings for which the town is so famous. Finally, we can see the wonderfully lively and authentic market of Comalapa where people still dress in the traditional textiles from the area to go about their daily lives. Included in the visit is a trip to the museum dedicated to the composer who wrote the music for Guatemala's National Anthem. After lunch we explore the Mayan ruins of Iximiche active from 1470-1524 AD with its temples, ball courts and remnants of palaces. We'll then continue onto beautiful Lake Atitlan and check into the Hotel Atitlan for two nights. *B/D*

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**Day 15, Monday 17th February  
CHICHICASTENANGO MARKET**

We will be picked up by our driver from our hotel and transferred approximately 1 hour to the highland town of Chichicastenango (meaning place of poison ivy). Upon arrival our guide will take us to explore this famous market and we will see the fruit and vegetable area as well as the craft area where we can appreciate beautiful textiles and wooden and ceramic crafts. We can also visit the famous St. Tomás Church where local Maya people come to perform Maya rituals. Lunch at leisure and then continue to Antigua via Sololá village. *B/D*

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**Day 16, Tuesday 18th February  
SAN JUAN LA LAGUNA & SANTIAGO LAKE TOUR**

We will be picked up from our hotel and transferred by boat to San Juan La Laguna village where we will visit a local textile cooperative to see the back strap loom in use, as well as the home and workshop of a local naïf



painter. After that, we'll board a boat to go to Santiago village for lunch. After the meal, we and our guide will enjoy a visit to the house where the Maya God Maximón is living. We'll also visit the local church and market to learn about the history and tradition of this town. When we are ready our driver will transfer us back to the hotel. Dinner tonight is at a local restaurant. *B/L/D*

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**Day 17, Wednesday 19th February**  
**ANTIGUA VIA SOLOLA**

After breakfast we will transfer to Solola to visit the town including its markets. After lunching at a local restaurant we will transfer to the pre Columbian archaeological site of Iximche where we will take a guided tour and also experience a spiritual Shaman ceremony. Dinner is at a local restaurant after we return to the hotel Posada de don Rodrigo. *B/L/D*

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**WELCOME TO HONDURAS**

**Day 18, Thursday 20th February**  
**COPAN, HONDURAS**

Today we will enjoy a private scenic transfer to Copán, Honduras, (5 Hours) crossing the border between the two countries (where a little patience is required). We will have the afternoon free to explore this small, colonial style town. Tonight is very special... you will be met at your hotel reception and transferred to Dr David Sedat's house in Copan. David led the team that discovered the royal tomb of the founder of the ancient Maya city of Copán, Honduras and is regarded as the world authority on Copan. David has lived in the region for many years. Upon arrival enjoy a welcome cocktail and "boquita". Then guests can enjoy an amazing presentation of some of David's work at Copan which covers some amazing discoveries that most visitors to Copan would never know about. During dinner at David's home you will have a chance to ask questions about the Copan site. This is a unique and fascinating activity that we are privileged to offer! *B/D*

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**Day 19, Friday 21st February**  
**COPAN RUINS & BIRD PARK**

Today, we visit the famous Mayan Site of Copán; known as the Paris of Ancient Mayan cities. Copán boasts many amazing creations such as intricately carved



stelae and an amazing hieroglyphic stairway. After touring the site and visiting the museum we return to Copán town for lunch.

After our meal, we can walk in the lush, shady river valley of the Copán Bird Park where a local guide will accompany us to see and interact with a number of beautiful tropical birds; rescued from all over Honduras. When we are ready, we will be transferred back to our hotel for dinner. *B/D*

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**Day 20, Saturday 22nd February**  
**COPAN, HONDURAS – RIO DULCE, GUATEMALA – LIVINGSTON**

Today we will enjoy a private scenic transfer to Río Dulce (4 hours). Upon arrival we'll be met at our hotel by our guide and boat captain. We will take a private cruise along the Río Dulce River through the central canyon and to the Garífuna town of Livingston on the coast. On the way we will be able to appreciate a great variety of birds, and if we get lucky, we may be able to glimpse the elusive manatee. Further along we will see the riverside villages before arriving at the hot springs, where there is time for a swim. Finally, we will arrive at the Garífuna town of Livingston, located on Guatemala's Caribbean Coast where there'll be time to explore before boarding the boat to return to Río Dulce. Overnight at The Catamaran. *B/L/D*

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**Day 21, Sunday 23rd February**  
**TRANSFER TO FLORES**

After breakfast we transfer to Flores (around 4 hours). We'll take a stroll through the delightful island township before transferring to Uaxactun for a community tour. The group will visit the site and for those up to it, climb the tower for snacks with the sun set in the background. Dinner is at a local community prior to returning to your campsite for the night. Don't despair, its more "glamping" than camping with you own bathroom and comfortable beds. *B/L/D*

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**Day 22, Monday 24th February**  
**TIKAL – GUATEMALA CITY**

After breakfast at the campsite, we'll be transferred to Tikal National Park



where we can enjoy a private guided tour of this amazing site, with huge temples rising up through the jungle canopy; and a variety of tropical animals and birds. We will have a luxury picnic lunch inside the park. After our meal, we'll explore the museum or return to the site unguided before being transferred back to Flores airport for an evening flight to either Antigua or Guatemala City (depending on the flight schedule for our trip home). *B/L/D*

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**Day 23, Tuesday 25th February**  
**DEPARTURE HOME**

Today we depart to fly to the US and then connect to Australia.