

# Mexico and Cuba

## A Cultural Feast

Departs 3rd November 2026

Blue Dot Travel





## MEXICO AND CUBA

Mexico is the world's largest Spanish-speaking country and with around 130 million people, 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. It was home to many advanced Mesoamerican civilisations such as the Olmec, Toltec, Teotihuacan, Zapotec, Mayan, and Aztec people. The first contact with Europeans was in the early 16th century. 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 and they are usually eager to share their wealth of history and abundant culture with travellers from other countries. Our tour of Mexico starts in Mexico City and then moves southeast 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 and reach the Yucatan Peninsula on the Caribbean coast after travelling through the heartland.

Cuba is an archipelago of islands in the Caribbean. The island of Cuba itself is by far the largest, at approximately 110,000 square kilometres. It's also the most populated with around 11 million inhabitants - over 2 million living in the capital – Havana. The first humans arrived in Cuba around 5,000 years ago from South America. In 1492, Christopher Columbus landed and claimed the islands for Spain. Small colonies were developed with the core aim of searching for gold, however, after minimal success, most turned to tobacco and sugar farming. The clichés of Cuba are a must see. Locals dancing the salsa, mambo and rumba, the men leisurely smoking their big fat cigars and drinking rum plus reminders of revolutionary figure, Che Guevara. Of course the quintessential postcard of Cuba is the 1950's Buicks and Chevys – spotted all over the country. Get to Cuba before too long ... it is changing!



**Departure, Monday 2nd November  
DEPART FOR MEXICO CITY**

Blue Dot will provide a flight itinerary that suits your needs.

**Day 1, Tuesday 3rd November  
ARRIVE MEXICO CITY**

One of the world's largest metropolises, Mexico City is also the oldest urban centre in the Western Hemisphere when it was called Tenochtitlan. Spanish conqueror Hernan Cortes and his men were awestruck by the sight of the imposing temples of the Aztecs. Reporting back to King Carlos V, Cortes was struggling to convey the majesty of what he saw. Nowhere is Mexico's explosive past better depicted than at its central plaza, the Zocalo. Surrounded by some of the finest buildings of the colonial era lie the remnants of one of the Aztecs' principal monuments, the Templo Mayor. Its mysterious shapes are a haunting tribute to the pre-Hispanic civilisation that flourished here long ago. The group will be collected from the airport and transferred to Hotel Casa Blanca (or similar) where we stay three nights. *D*

**Day 2, Wednesday 4th November  
MEXICO CITY & SURROUNDS**

Today the group will see the core sights of Mexico City. Our first stop is the Zocalo (main square), one of the biggest public squares in the world. We will visit the Cathedral Metropolitana – the biggest church in Latin America, and the Palacio Nacional (if it is open), which hosts Diego Rivera's murals depicting the history of Mexico. We continue to a handicraft market, where we will have time for browsing. Then, we'll

drive along the famous boulevard Paseo de la Reforma, built during the short-lived reign of Emperor Maximilian to connect the main square and his castle in Chapultepec. Visit the National Museum of Anthropology which contains one of the world's largest collections of archaeological and anthropological artefacts from pre-hispanic Mayan civilisations to the Spanish conquest. Lunch will be at a local restaurant before visiting Frida Kahlo Museum. Coyoacan, a former colonial village located in the south of Mexico City, still has its own identity, with narrow colonial-era streets, plazas, cafes and a lively bohemian atmosphere. We will walk along the main plaza, churches and beautiful old buildings, including the house of conqueror Hernan Cortes. We continue to visit Frida Kahlo's home, where she was born, lived much of her life, and eventually died. The house is a treasure trove of her paintings and innumerable artefacts associated with her and her husband, famous muralist Diego Rivera. *B/L/D*

**Day 3, Thursday 5th  
November  
TEOTIHUACAN  
PYRAMIDS &  
GUADALUPE**

After breakfast, we'll visit Teotihuacan Pyramids and Guadalupe Shrine. On the way, a stop at the Plaza de las Tres Culturas, where three cultures converge: Aztec, Spanish, and contemporary Mexican. We'll continue to the Basílica of Guadalupe, Latin America's most revered religious shrine. Here, 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 will have time to explore the New Basilica de Guadalupe (the Old Basilica, built in 1700, is slowly sinking) and to see Juan Diego's cloak. We will then continue driving another hour to Teotihuacan, one of the most impressive cities of the ancient world, held sacred by the Aztecs. We'll 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, one of the biggest in the world. *B/L/D*

#### **Day 4, Friday 6th November OAXACA**

Oaxaca, located in a valley surrounded by the Sierra Madre del Sur, 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 Albán centuries before the birth of Christ. Two of Mexico's most famous presidents, Benito Juárez and Porfirio Díaz, were of Zapotec origin. 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 Indian at heart, wherein lies its charm. Check in to the Hotel Hostal de La Noria (or similar) for three nights. *B/L/D*



#### **Day 5, Saturday 7th November MONTE ALBAN & OAXACA**

Today, 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 region's cultural, religious, and economic life. It is also a triumph of engineering; the mountaintop was levelled to allow for the creation of the ceremonial site. We will explore the Gran Plaza, Ball Court, Observatory, and Palace and other beautiful structures. Later, We will walk through the streets of the colonial city centre, along the Cathedral – with its attractive baroque facade, the Iglesia de Santo Domingo – a church with a breathtaking interior that dazzles with gold ornaments, and the Casa Juárez – where Mexico's great liberal reformer and president Benito Juárez lived. 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, Sunday 8th November MITLA ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE**

We will visit the Tule Tree "Arbol del Tule", one of the world's largest trees in the world and thought to be over 2000 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. The Spanish destroyed many of Mitla's temples, 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 mezal tasting and to watch the elaboration process. *B/L/D*

#### **Day 7, Monday 9th November OAXACA – SAN CRISTOBAL DE LAS CASAS**

Today we transfer to the airport to fly to San Cristobal de las Casas, a characteristically indigenous Chiapaneca town nestled in the heart of the jungle highlands. The only way to reach San Cristobal is via a two-hour drive from Tuxtla Gutierrez. En route, the tropical heat and plant life prevalent in Tuxtla Gutierrez gradually give way to the cool 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. On arrival we'll take a boat trip around the Sumidero Canyon before checking in to the Hotel Casavieja (or similar) for just the one night. *B/L/D*



#### **Day 8, Tuesday 10th November PALENQUE & SAN CRISTOBAL DE LAS CASAS**

We will explore the colonial city centre of San Cristobal de las Casas on foot, visiting the cathedral on the north side of the pretty main square, which has a lavish interior and a 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. In the foothills of the Tumbala mountains, the ancient Maya site of Palenque sits on a ledge overlooking the swampy plains stretching northward to the Gulf coast. Palenque was at its height between 500 and 700 AD, when its influence extended throughout the basin of the Usumacinta River. The elegance and craftsmanship of the buildings and the lightness of the sculpted reliefs with their Mayan

mythological themes attest to the creative genius of this civilisation. It was the floodplain 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. It would have produced a harvest that could sustain a large workforce and provide an abundance that could be traded along the Usumacinta. The gods seemed to be as enchanted with Palenque as today's visitors. Check in to the Hotel Misión Palenque (or similar) for just one night. **B/L/D**



**Day 9, Wednesday  
11th November  
CAMPECHE**

Campeche, located on the Gulf of Mexico, was the principal sea port on the Yucatán

Peninsula from the 16th to the 18th centuries, and subsequently a major target of pirates such as Lorenzillo, Diego "The Mulatto" and William Parker. The Spanish Crown ordered the city's fortification to protect the port from attacks. Remnants of the original fortress surrounding the entire town still stand, including ramparts and gates, giving the city a decidedly romantic, swashbuckling air. The ramparts now house museums, and the Land Gate is the site of a dramatic light and sound show that reflects the pirate era. We will visit the archaeological site of Palenque, a World Heritage Site located 7km outside of the town of Palenque. Palenque flourished between 600 and 800 AD when its influence extended throughout the basin of the Usumacinta River. The site, surrounded by rainforest where toucans and howler monkeys live, comprises 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. Check in to the Hotel Misión Campeche (or similar) for one night. **B/L/D**

**Day 10, Thursday 12th November  
CAMPECHE – MERIDA**

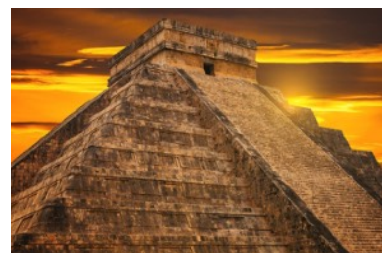
Departure from Campeche to Mérida, stopping at the archaeological site of Uxmal, a World Heritage Site, is located 80km south of Merida. Its architecture is characterised by low horizontal palaces around courtyards, decorated with symbolic motifs and sculptures depicting the long-nosed rain god Chaac. We will explore the magnificent buildings, including the House of the Magician – which dominates the site, the Nunnery, and the House of Turtles. Built more than 450 years ago on the site of T'ho, an ancient

Mayan city, Merida is the social and economic centre and capital of the state of Yucatan. Merida's downtown area features a large, tree-shaded central square. The city's main boulevard, Paseo Montejo, is home to impressive European-style mansions with pastel shades and elaborate trim reminiscent of lavishly iced wedding cakes. Though a bustling city of about 700,000, Merida retains its colonial charm and has a laid-back tempo that delights visitors. It is a good base from which to explore the Mayan archaeological sites of Chichen-Itza and Uxmal. Pink flamingo sanctuaries and swimmable crystal-clear cenotes (sinkholes) are some of the natural attractions of the Yucatan Peninsula that are easily accessible from Merida. Stay at the Hotel El Conquistador (or similar). **B/L/D**

**Day 11, Friday 13th November  
MERIDA – CANCUN**

Over 40 years ago Cancun was no more than a sand bar, clinging to Mexico's Caribbean coast. Only in the 70s did the government see the appeal of the area's shimmering turquoise waters and sparkling white sand, largely untouched since the mysterious decline of the Mayan Empire around the 13th century. Today, Cancun is an exciting beach destination and gateway to the Mundo Maya, or Maya World. The

archaeological site of Chichen Itza – one of the New 7 Wonders of the World – 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 near the site. This cenote is open to the sky and adorned with vegetation, 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 of view. Check in to the Hotel Beachscape Kin Ha Villas & Suites (or similar). Tonight, we'll have a farewell Mexico dinner. **B/L/D**



**WELCOME TO CUBA**

**Day 12, Saturday 14th November  
HAVANA**

This morning, we transfer to the airport for our flight to Havana, Cuba. Upon arrival in Havana, we'll check into The Hotel Palacio Corredores (or similar) in the old town, where we will stay for three nights. The rest of the day is at leisure. A special welcome dinner tonight is at a local restaurant Al Carbon-Ivan Justo. **B/D**



**Day 13, Sunday  
15th November  
HAVANA**

After breakfast, we'll take a guided walking tour of old Havana, the city's heart and a UNESCO World

Heritage site since 1982. Nowhere in Latin America will you find such fine examples of Spanish colonial architecture. We will stop at various bars during the tour for refreshments and live music. You'll visit the room where Ernest Hemingway lived and wrote for many years and numerous other key sites around the city, including the main plazas. Free time for lunch, then in the afternoon, we will complete our tour of the old town, including a visit to the Revolution Museum and the Havana Club Rum Museum. Tonight's dinner is at Guajirito Cultural Center in Old Havana (which pays homage to revered musicians of the Buena Vista Social Club). Enjoy live music and a dancing show!

**B/D**

**Day 14, Monday 16th November  
PINAR DEL RIO**

After breakfast, we'll depart to Viñales Valley, stopping at the lookout point of "Los Jasmines" to admire the unique and picturesque landscape of the valley as its "Mogotes," rocky summit formations capriciously placed by nature. The tour continues by bus to "La Cueva del Indio" where we will sail in traditional boats along an underground river that passes through the interior of some of the Haystack Hillcock Mountains. Lunch is at "El Palenque de los Cimarrones" a local restaurant where the group will enjoy a delicious Creole meal. We'll then visit the Mural of the Prehistory and return to the hotel in Havana. Evening at leisure in Old Havana. **B/L**



**Day 15, Tuesday  
17th November  
CIENFUEGOS &  
TRINIDAD**

After breakfast at the hotel, depart for Cienfuegos, stopping for a coffee break at Fiesta Campesina.

The first settlers to this area were French colonists coming from Louisiana. They gave the town its unique French Colonial style with a "real" Cuban feel. We'll visit the beautiful opera building, walk around the square and have lunch at a local restaurant (Villa Lagarto). Then, we'll transfer to Trinidad – a wonderful colonial town built on the foothills of the Escambray Mountains. The town was founded in 1515 by Diego Velazquez, one of the original Spanish settlers who arrived with Columbus. We will check into the Grand

Iberostar Hotel (or similar) for two nights. Dinner is at your leisure tonight. We suggest one of the local restaurants within walking distance of the hotel. **B/L**

**Day 16,  
Wednesday 18th  
November  
TRINIDAD**

After breakfast, we'll start our day with a Trinidad Old Town walking tour.

Trinidad was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1988. Enjoy its winding cobbled streets with magnificent old churches, museums and a good choice of restaurants and bars. There is a busy street market selling handmade souvenirs and some antiques. We'll visit the Plaza Mayor in the centre of the old town, The Iglesia Parroquial de la Santisima Trinidad, El Palacio Brunet now the Romantic Museum, the Alejandro von Humboldt Natural History Museum, the Casa de Sanchez Iznaga and the Palacio Ortiz. We will also visit the craftsman market and the Canchanchara, one of the most famous bars in Trinidad. Lunch is at Museo 1514, a local restaurant. Then we will go on to the picturesque "El Valle de los Ingenios" dotted with the ruins of sugar mills, manor houses, slave quarters and warehouses. Dinner is at your leisure tonight. **B/L**



**Day 17, Thursday  
19th November  
HAVANA**

After breakfast, we'll return to Havana for our last night in Cuba. We'll be taken to the wonderful San Carlos de La Cabaña



fortresses to get a great view of Havana city from the opposite side of the bay. Spend 30 minutes walking through the fort before a fleet of American convertible classic cars from the 50's will whisk us away to see the sites of the old city. We'll drive along the famous Malecon, Havana's 7 km long seafront promenade and on to other iconic sites, including the Hotel National and Revolution Plaza. You are free to explore any particular areas of interest in the afternoon or soak up this fabulous city. Check in to the Hotel Palacio Los Corredores (or similar). Our farewell Cuba dinner tonight is at a local restaurant, Paladar Los Mercaderes, with a special seafood menu. **B/D**

**Day 18, Friday 20th November  
DEPARTURE**

Transfer to Havana airport for the flight home or to your next destination. **B/D**



Icon indicates a day where there is **moderate physical exertion**. A basic level of fitness is required: eg. A trek over 'mostly flat' terrain or climbing several flights of steps without the support of handrails or elevators.



Icon indicates a day where there is a **particularly active section**. A good level of fitness is required: eg. A longer trek over non-groomed, uneven terrain, or ascending to reach a panorama. May also include exposure to higher altitude. **An alternate activity may be offered if you choose to sit out an active section.** Please call - we are happy to discuss each tour in more detail.