

# Grand Circle Travel<sup>®</sup>

THE LEADER IN VALUE AND WORLDWIDE DISCOVERY SINCE 1958

## Your Grand Circle Travel Planning Guide



Cultural Capitals & Ancient Heritage:  
Mexico City to Oaxaca

2025

# Grand Circle Travel®

347 Congress Street, Boston, MA 02210

Dear Traveler,

I am thrilled that you are considering exploring the world with Grand Circle Travel. There are so many wonderful destinations to discover, and the itinerary described inside is a perfect way to fulfill a travel dream.

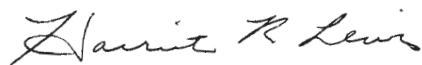
When you travel with us, you will enjoy a thoughtfully designed itinerary that balances unforgettable included discoveries with time for independent explorations. Your experience will be enriched by the company of like-minded American travelers and an **expert, local Program Director**. Assigned to a group of 30 travelers on average, these passionate leaders are ready and eager to share their homeland and insights as only a local can. Whether it is recommending their favorite restaurant, connecting travelers with people and culture, or providing the best regional maps to enhance your leisure time, your Program Director will be available to take care of all the details and ensure that you have a fun and carefree travel experience. You can also rely on the seasoned team at our regional office, who are ready to help 24/7 in case any unexpected circumstances arise.

Throughout your explorations, you will experience Exclusive Discovery Series events designed to connect you with local people and culture. From sharing traditional fare and lively conversation during Home-Hosted Visits, to discussing Controversial Topics impacting everyday life, you'll gain an intimate understanding of your destination, not just a superficial view. And if you choose to travel solo, you will enjoy all these cultural experiences at an unmatched value, with our FREE or low-cost Single Supplements—just one of the reasons we continue to be the leader in solo travel.

Plus, you can put your own personal stamp on your trip, like the **87% of our travelers who personalize their experience**. Perhaps you will choose to see more of your destination by adding an optional trip extension to your itinerary. You can also arrive a few days early to explore independently and get acclimated, customize your air itinerary, and more.

I hope you find this Travel Planning Guide helpful. If you have any further questions, do not hesitate to contact one of our Travel Counselors at **1-800-221-2610**.

Warm regards,



Harriet R. Lewis  
Chair  
Grand Circle Travel

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Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe, Mexico City

## Cultural Capitals & Ancient Heritage: Mexico City to Oaxaca

**Mexico:** Mexico City, Puebla, Oaxaca

**12 days starting from \$3,195**

including airfare

Single Supplement: **FREE**

For departure dates & prices, visit

[www.gct.com/mex2025pricing](http://www.gct.com/mex2025pricing)

Begin your journey in Mexico City—the country’s cosmopolitan heart, built upon the ruins of the Aztec capital, and now one of the largest cities in the world. Then immerse yourself in Mexico’s colonial history in Puebla, admiring its elegant architecture, gilded churches, and tantalizing cuisine, before ending your journey in Oaxaca, where you’ll experience the city’s deep indigenous roots, captivating contemporary art, and vibrant modern culture.

### IT’S INCLUDED

- Choose to **purchase Grand Circle’s airfare**, and your airport transfers, government taxes, fees, and airline fuel surcharges are included. Or, make your own air arrangements
- **Accommodations** for 11 nights
- **21 meals:** 11 breakfasts, 5 lunches, and 5 dinners
- **14 included features:** 7 guided tours and 5 exclusive Discovery Series events: Mexican cooking experience • Benito Juárez Market visit • Chocolate factory visit • Wool weaving demonstration • Don Agave mezcal distillery visit
- **Personal headset** for all included and optional tours on your main trip
- **Gratuities** on your main trip for local guides and motorcoach drivers
- Exclusive services of a local **Grand Circle Program Director** (assigned to no more than 42 travelers)
- Private motorcoach land travel
- Baggage handling for 1 piece of luggage per person, including tips
- **5% Frequent Traveler Credit** toward your next trip

*Prices are accurate as of the date of this publishing and are subject to change.*

**Cultural Capitals & Ancient Heritage: Mexico City to Oaxaca**



## ITINERARY SUMMARY

### 1 • Fly to Mexico City, Mexico

### 2-4 • Mexico City

Included Tours Mexico City, National Museum of Anthropology, Teotihuacan

### 5-6 • Puebla

Included Tour Puebla

### 7-11 • Oaxaca

Included Tours Oaxaca, Mitla, Monte Alban

### 12 • Return to U.S.

## WHAT TO EXPECT

① ② ③ ④ ⑤ Moderately Easy

### Group Size

- A maximum of 42 travelers, led by a local Grand Circle Program Director

### Pacing

- 3 locations in 12 days
- 1 day features 6-8 hours of travel by motorcoach
- Air travel time will be 2-8 hours and will most likely have one connection

### Physical Requirements

- Walk 2 miles unassisted and participate in 2 hours of physical activities daily, including stairs, steep hills, and cobblestones
- Mexico's pre-Hispanic ruins may require navigating steep steps without railings and uneven terrain

- Not accessible for travelers using wheelchairs, scooters, walkers, crutches, or other mobility aids
- We reserve the right for Program Directors to restrict participation, or in some circumstances send travelers home, if their limitations impact the group's experience

### Terrain & Transportation

- Uneven walking surfaces, including unpaved paths, hills, stairs, and cobblestones
- Travel by 45-seat motorcoach, cable car, chair lift, and two 20-person boats

### Climate

- Daytime temperatures range from 75-105°F during touring season
- March-May are the warmest months

## MAXIMIZE YOUR DISCOVERIES & VALUE

### OPTIONAL EXTENSIONS

all with FREE Single Supplements

**Mexico's Colonial Highlands:**  
San Miguel de Allende & Querétaro

**PRE-TRIP:** 5 nights from **\$1,495**

**The Yucatán Peninsula:**  
Campeche & Mérida

**POST-TRIP:** 5 nights from **\$1,695**



# Cultural Capitals & Ancient Heritage: Mexico City to Oaxaca

## YOUR DETAILED ITINERARY

### BEGIN YOUR TRIP WITH AN OPTIONAL PRE-TRIP EXTENSION

#### 5 nights in *Mexico's Colonial Highlands: San Miguel de Allende & Querétaro*

**Day 1** Depart U.S. • Arrive San Miguel de Allende, Mexico

**Day 2** Explore San Miguel de Allende

**Day 3** San Miguel de Allende • Visit Guanajuato

**Day 4** San Miguel de Allende • Explore Querétaro • Querétaro Regional Museum

**Day 5** Querétaro • Dairy farm visit

**Day 6** Visit Bernal • Transfer to Mexico City

#### **Day 1** Depart U.S. • Arrive Mexico City, Mexico

- Destination: Mexico City
- Accommodations: Barcelo Mexico Reforma Hotel or similar

Travel to Mexico City today, with your arrival time depending on your departure city. You'll be met at the airport by a Grand Circle representative and then transfer to your hotel, where you'll be introduced to your Program Director and fellow travelers—including those arriving from their *Mexico's Colonial Highlands: San Miguel de Allende & Querétaro* pre-trip extension—during a Welcome Briefing.

You'll join your group for an orientation walk of the neighborhood surrounding your hotel, during which your Program Director will offer restaurant suggestions for dinner, which is on your own tonight.

#### **Day 2** Explore Mexico City

- Destination: Mexico City
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch
- Accommodations: Barcelo Mexico Reforma Hotel or similar

**Activity Note:** You will be staying in Mexico City for four nights, which is located more than 7,000 feet above sea level. We recommend staying hydrated while at high altitude. Travelers may rest at the hotel if necessary.

**Breakfast:** At the hotel.

**Morning:** Begin the day with a Welcome Briefing, where you will meet your Program Director and fellow travelers, including those who took our *Mexico's Colonial Highlands: San Miguel de Allende & Querétaro* pre-trip extension. Then, you'll set off to discover Mexico City, the largest city in the country. In fact, with a population of around 9 million, it's also one of the largest cities in the world. Founded by Spanish *conquistadores* atop

the ruins of the conquered Aztec city of Tenochtitlan, Mexico's capital today is a cosmopolitan blend of traditional Mexican and European influences; a heady mix of pre-Columbian archaeological sites, art nouveau, art deco, and modernist architecture; as well as a burgeoning culinary scene.

You'll ride by motorcoach to Mexico's historic center (a UNESCO World Heritage Site), where you'll set out for an included walking tour. Begin your explorations in the *zocaló*—the main square around which the city is centered—also known as the Plaza de la Constitución. The *zocaló* is located near many of Mexico City's important historic buildings, such as the National Palace and the Metropolitan Cathedral. Conclude your walking tour outside of the Palacio de Bellas Artes, or the museum of fine arts. The structure itself, framed in gleaming white Carrara marble, is a masterpiece, blending art nouveau and art deco styles, crowned with a roof resembling the scales of a dragon.

**Lunch:** Enjoy a Welcome Lunch at a local restaurant, featuring regional cuisine.

**Afternoon:** After lunch, stop by Mexico City's Post Office. More than just the city's central post office, the building itself is wondrous to behold, adorned with baroque columns and carved filigree around the windows. Next, take a stroll through La Alameda Park, Mexico City's oldest public park—a tranquil, leafy retreat in the midst of a bustling metropolis.

**Dinner:** On your own. You can ask your Program Director for dining recommendations.

**Evening:** You can continue the evening as you wish, or retire to your room and rest up for tomorrow's discoveries.

### Day 3 Mexico City • Visit Teotihuacán

- Destination: Mexico City
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch
- Accommodations: Barcelo Mexico Reforma Hotel or similar

**Activity Note:** Today you will visit Teotihuacán, the first of several pre-Columbian ruins on this itinerary, for approximately 2.5 hours. Exploring Mexico's archaeological sites often requires navigating steep steps without railings and uneven terrain; depending on your level of comfort and mobility, your local guide can offer a choice of activities at each of the ruins you'll visit throughout your journey to suit your personal needs.

**Breakfast:** At the hotel.

**Morning:** Board your motorcoach this morning and travel to the ruins of Teotihuacán, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, and one of the most important pre-Hispanic cities in all of Mexico.

Although the name “Teotihuacán” (which translates to “place where the gods were created”) was given to the city by the Aztecs, its mysterious builders lived here more than 1,000 years prior, founding the city some time between 100 BC and AD 650. Archaeologists estimate that the ancient metropolis, covering an area of about eight square miles, once boasted a population of around 100,000 people, making it the largest city in the Western Hemisphere until the 1400s when it was discovered by the Aztecs.

Much of Teotihuacán's history and culture remains the subject of rigorous scholarly debate, but over its long lifespan, it was home to several indigenous cultures including Maya, Mixtec, and Zapotec people, each of whom left their mark. Whoever Teotihuacán's creators

were, they built the city to last, as you'll discover during your tour of the ruins with an expert, local guide.

Ponder the mysteries of Teotihuacán—such as why it had been abandoned by the time the Aztecs found it—as you wander up its grand central road, the Street of the Dead, lined with structures that have survived the test of time. You'll marvel at temples and step pyramids, including the Temple of Quetzalcoatl, and the Pyramids of the Sun and Moon, which rival the great pyramids of Egypt in their size and grandeur. Learn about how the city's inhabitants were capable of sophistication and ruthlessness in equal measure; some of Teotihuacán's temples have been revealed to be the sites of human and animal sacrifice, performed for unknown purposes.

**Lunch:** After your tour, you'll enjoy an included lunch with your fellow travelers at a restaurant located near the ruins.

**Afternoon:** Return to Mexico City, where you'll arrive in the mid afternoon and enjoy the rest of the day to explore independently.

**Dinner/Evening:** Continue making independent discoveries this evening, with dinner on your own. Ask your Program Director for restaurant recommendations.

#### **Day 4 Mexico City • Visit National Museum of Anthropology • Boat ride in Xochimilco**

- Destination: Mexico City
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner
- Accommodations: Barcelo Mexico Reforma Hotel or similar

**Breakfast:** At the hotel.

**Morning:** Today, you'll visit Mexico City's National Museum of Anthropology, home to one of the world's largest collections of archaeological and anthropological finds from

pre-Hispanic Maya cultures to the Spanish conquest. Showcasing artifacts from all of Mexico's indigenous civilizations—including Aztec, Mixtec, and Zapotec as well as Maya—the museum is also home to the famed Aztec Calendar, a 12-foot, 25-ton, carved basalt stone slab, dating to the late 1400s.

You'll witness some of the museum's most fascinating exhibits during an included tour, and then have some free time to wander on your own and learn more. The insights you'll gain here are sure to be helpful over the days to come, offering valuable context to the archaeological sites that await you.

**Lunch:** On your own. Ask your Program Director for dining options.

**Afternoon:** After lunch, we'll drive out to the magical floating world of Xochimilco, a rarified town Spanish conquistadors called “the Venice of the New World,” now a UNESCO World Heritage site. Once a thriving Aztec city on a lake, today the verdant canals are home to colorful *chinampas* (floating gardens) and have become a popular weekend escape for locals and travelers alike. We'll enjoy a ride along the canals aboard a colorful, traditional boat before returning to our hotel in Mexico City.

**Dinner:** At a local restaurant.

**Evening:** Spend the rest of the evening as you wish.

#### **Day 5 Mexico City • Transfer to Puebla**

- Destination: Puebla
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner
- Accommodations: NH Puebla Centro Historico or similar

**Breakfast:** At the hotel.



**Morning:** Bid *adios* to Mexico City this morning as you begin your transfer to Puebla, the next stop on your journey.

**Lunch:** On your own.

**Afternoon:** Continue on your way to Puebla, arriving in the mid-afternoon. You'll check in to your hotel upon arrival, and then have a few hours to relax or explore on your own before joining your Program Director for a short orientation walk to acquaint yourself with your surroundings.

**Dinner:** Enjoy an included dinner with your fellow travelers at a local restaurant.

**Evening:** You have the freedom to spend the rest of your evening as you wish—ask your Program Director for recommendations.

## Day 6 Explore Puebla

- Destination: Puebla
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner
- Accommodations: NH Puebla Centro Historico or similar

**Breakfast:** At the hotel.

**Morning:** Explore the city of Puebla on an included tour this morning. Established by the Spanish in 1531 on the main route between the port of Veracruz (the most important port in Mexico) and Mexico City, Puebla was the principal city of colonial Mexico. Puebla's appearance is the most European of all of Mexico's colonial cities, because it was planned by a Spanish city designer rather than being built around an existing native community.

You'll start your city tour at a workshop where Puebla's renowned Talavera pottery is made. These intricately designed ceramics are prized the world over for their elaborate decorations and masterful craftsmanship, utilizing techniques that date back to colonial

times. Authentic Talavera pottery uses only six colors—blue, yellow, black, green, orange, and mauve—which can only be crafted from natural pigments. You'll learn about the production process from a master artisan at the workshop. Then, take a stroll along Calle de los Dulces, or Sweets Street, a three-block stretch of the city lined with *dulcerias* (candy shops) selling a wide variety of sugary snacks, from baked goods, to local candies and delicacies, like *camotes*, a Puebla specialty made from sweet potato.

You'll end your tour at the Capilla del Rosario, or Rosary Chapel, of the Church of Santo Domingo in the city center. The interior of this 17th-century baroque chapel is bedecked in gold leaf from floor to ceiling, which, when it catches the sunlight pouring in from the dome above, takes on a heavenly glow designed to inspire awe in all who come to visit.

**Lunch:** On your own. You can ask your Program Director for local restaurant recommendations.

**Afternoon:** The rest of the day is yours to explore Puebla at leisure. Your Program Director can offer suggestions on how to best spend your time.

If you're interested in learning more about the city's famous architecture, you might choose to visit the International Museum of the Baroque. The museum, whose all-white façade resembles sheets of paper floating in a breeze, traces the history and significance of this aesthetic movement, and explores the influences that it has had on Puebla and the world at large.

**Dinner:** At a local restaurant.

**Evening:** Spend the remainder of the evening as you wish.

## Day 7 Puebla • Transfer to Oaxaca

- Destination: Oaxaca
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
- Accommodations: Holiday Inn Express Oaxaca Centro Historico Hotel or similar

**Breakfast:** At the hotel.

**Morning:** Depart Puebla today and begin your overland transfer to Oaxaca. You'll travel for about 6–7 hours by motorcoach, traversing a scenic landscape of desert vegetation and gentle hills undulating in the background.

**Lunch:** A boxed lunch will be provided on the way to Oaxaca.

**Afternoon:** Continue your journey toward Oaxaca, arriving at your hotel in the mid-afternoon. Get acquainted with your neighborhood on a short orientation walk with your Program Director, and enjoy some time to relax or explore on your own before dinner.

**Dinner:** Join your fellow travelers for an included dinner at your hotel this evening.

**Evening:** You have the freedom to spend the rest of your evening as you wish—ask your Program Director for recommendations.

## Day 8 Visit Mitla • Explore Oaxaca

- Destination: Oaxaca
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch
- Accommodations: Holiday Inn Express Oaxaca Centro Historico Hotel or similar

**Breakfast:** At the hotel.

**Morning:** Depart for the pre-Hispanic city of Mitla, an ancient Zapotec religious and ceremonial site. These fascinating ruins are adorned with ancient hand-cut stone mosaics, believed to date back to the last two or three centuries before the arrival of the Spanish. A UNESCO World Heritage Site, Mitla

is comprised of five sections of ruins—the best-preserved groups being the church and columns. Mitla also features 14 occurrences of the same intricate geometric design that can be found carved into buildings throughout the site.

**Lunch:** Enjoy an included lunch at a local restaurant on your way back to Oaxaca.

**Afternoon:** Your walking tour of Oaxaca will begin with a visit to Benito Juárez *mercado* (market) where vendors sell everything from dried chili peppers and fresh *queso* (cheese) to traditional clothing and hand-woven baskets. Food stalls are also plentiful, offering warm tortillas, grilled meats, even spicy *chapulines* (grasshoppers toasted with chili).

Next, you will explore Oaxaca's *zocaló*, or main square. Officially known as the Plaza de la Constitucion, this tree-filled square is the heart of the city, used daily by the locals to gather, socialize, and occasionally assemble for political protests. Bursting with cafes, restaurants, and a bevy of street entertainers and vendors—the *zocaló* is full of tempting options for authentic meals and shopping experiences, both of which your Program Director can recommend for your leisure time.

Finally, you will stop to admire Santo Domingo Church. Construction on the impressive church began in 1555 but wasn't completed for another hundred years. Its relatively simple 17th-century façade belies the extravagance that awaits within—its lavishly decorated interior is a magnificent example of baroque architecture.

**Dinner:** On your own. Ask your Program Director for restaurant recommendations.

**Evening:** Continue your independent discoveries this evening,

## Day 9 Oaxaca • Optional *Folk Art of Oaxaca* Tour

- Destination: Oaxaca
- Included Meals: Breakfast
- Accommodations: Holiday Inn Express Oaxaca Centro Historico Hotel or similar

**Breakfast:** At the hotel.

**Morning:** Today is yours to spend in Oaxaca as you please. Or, you can choose to immerse yourself in two distinct local craft traditions on our full-day *Folk Art of Oaxaca* optional tour.

This optional tour begins by visiting the town of San Martin Tilcajete to learn about the secrets of the *alebrijes*, fantastically-colored wooden animals carved from the pliant wood of the copal tree into the shape of mythical creatures (you might recognize them from the 2017 Pixar film, *Coco*). According to legend, the *alebrije* was conceived in the 1930s by the artist Pedro Linares during a fever dream; drifting in and out of sleep, he found himself in a forest, surrounded by strange and colorful beasts, shouting the meaningless word: “*alebrije!*” When he awoke, he was inspired to bring these creations to life, and a famous Oaxacan tradition was born. You’ll see how *alebrijes* are made today during a demonstration from a local artist, and enjoy the opportunity to browse a collection of finished works.

**Lunch:** If you’ve joined our optional tour, you’ll have an included lunch at a local restaurant in San Martin Tilcajete. Otherwise, lunch is on your own in Oaxaca today—ask your Program Director for local restaurant recommendations.

**Afternoon:** Your optional tour continues in the village of San Bartolo Coyotepec, famous for the production of black clay pottery. A steady hand and skilled precision are required to master this difficult craft, which you’ll have the opportunity to learn about from a local artisan in their workshop. They’ll walk you through the

complex production process, and explain about the important role that black pottery plays in the local village economy.

Then, return to your hotel in Oaxaca, where the rest of the day is at leisure.

**Dinner/Evening:** Continue making independent discoveries this evening, with dinner on your own. Ask your Program Director for restaurant recommendations.

## Day 10 Teotitlan del Valle culinary and chocolate experience • Mezcal distillery tour

- Destination: Oaxaca
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch
- Accommodations: Holiday Inn Express Oaxaca Centro Historico Hotel or similar

**Breakfast:** At the hotel.

**Morning:** Today, you will have the special opportunity to experience Zapotec culture in Teotitlan del Valle, a small weaving village nestled in the foothills of the Sierra Juárez mountains. You will discover Teotitlan’s deeply rooted indigenous traditions when a member of a local Zapotec family takes us around the village. We’ll begin with a visit the local covered market, often filled with Zapotec women carrying woven baskets and shopping for their home and family. We’re not just here to observe the market bustle, though. We will join them by selecting some of the fresh produce, chiles, local spices, and other ingredients that will be used to prepare our lunch.

**Lunch:** After our market visit, you will enjoy a very special included lunch in the home of a local family, an exclusive Discovery Series event. But first, you will discover a few Oaxacan culinary secrets by helping out in the preparation of your meal. Of course, the secret in communities like these is that almost everything is fresh and made by hand, a labor



of love where chiles, spices, and grains are crushed and worked with grinding stones. You'll then get to enjoy the fruits of your labor by sitting down with our gracious hosts and sampling our creations while learning more about traditional ways of life in this picturesque village in the state of Oaxaca.

For dessert you will have the famous chocolate made in Oaxaca. While much of the world simply calls it "Mexican chocolate," it is here where the distinct recipe was created. Typical Oaxaca chocolate is ground with sugar, almonds, and cinnamon before being formed into bars. Wonderful in both hot and cold chocolate beverages alike, Oaxaca chocolate is also used in savory dishes, such as spicy mole sauce.

**Afternoon:** Your next stop will be a mezcal distillery for another exclusive Discovery Series event. Here, you will learn the centuries-old art of distilling mezcal, like tequila but distinguished by a smoky finish—from the harvest and slow roasting of the spiny agave plant to a taste of the final result. After this experience, you'll return to your hotel in Oaxaca and have the remainder of the day free.

**Dinner/Evening:** Continue making independent discoveries this evening, with dinner on your own. Ask your Program Director for restaurant recommendations.

## Day 11 Oaxaca • Visit Monte Albán

- Destination: Oaxaca
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner
- Accommodations: Holiday Inn Express Oaxaca Centro Historico Hotel or similar

**Breakfast:** At the hotel.

**Morning:** Witness another of Oaxaca's ancient wonders today as you discover the ruins of Monte Albán, or White Mountain. But first, stop on your way to admire the Fountain of

the Seven Regions for a more modern example of Mexican heritage. Constructed in 1927, the fountain features seven figures meant to represent the seven indigenous regions of Oaxaca.

Next you will arrive at your main destination, Monte Albán. Gaze upon the ruins of a once-majestic Zapotec capital city; its lofty mountain-top location offers both spectacular views and insight to the location's importance during its time. A UNESCO World Heritage Site, Monte Albán stretches out around you—a dizzying expanse of temples, plazas, residential areas, and majestic pyramids.

After your tour of the ruins, you'll return to Oaxaca; you'll have the option of returning to the hotel, or being dropped off in the city center to explore on your own.

**Lunch:** On your own—ask your Program Director for local restaurant recommendations.

**Afternoon:** Free for your own discoveries—ask your Program Director for recommendations. Perhaps you'll visit the Ethnobotanical Garden, which showcases not just the unique flora of the Oaxaca region, but is specifically arranged to tell the story of its people. Each section of the garden is organized around a theme, explaining how the indigenous people of the region have utilized the plants in their cuisine, art, and medicine, throughout time.

Before dinner, you'll gather with your fellow travelers to recap your journey during a Farewell Briefing.

**Dinner:** Toast your discoveries during an included Farewell Dinner at a local restaurant.

**Evening:** You have the freedom to spend the rest of your evening as you wish—ask your Program Director for recommendations.

## Day 12 Oaxaca • Return to U.S.

- Included Meals: Breakfast

**Breakfast:** At the hotel. For early morning airport transfers, a boxed breakfast will be made available.

**Morning:** Transfer to the airport for your flight home. Or, begin your post-trip extension in *The Yucatán Peninsula: Campeche & Mérida*.

### END YOUR TRIP WITH AN OPTIONAL POST-TRIP EXTENSION

#### 5 nights in *The Yucatán Peninsula: Campeche & Mérida*

**Day 1** Oaxaca • Fly to Campeche

**Day 2** Explore Campeche • Visit Mayan Architectural Museum

**Day 3** Visit Uxmal • Transfer to Mérida

**Day 4** Mérida • Visit Chichén Itzá

**Day 5** Explore Mérida • Cenote experience

**Day 6** Mérida • Return to U.S.

## OPTIONAL TOURS

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During your trip you will be able to book optional tours directly with your Program Director. He or she will ask you to confirm the payment for these tours by filling out a payment form. Optional tours can only be purchased with a credit or debit card. We accept Visa, MasterCard, and Discover credit cards. We also accept Visa and MasterCard debit cards, but it must be a debit card that allows you to sign for purchases. We do not accept American Express.

In order to correctly process these charges, there can be a delay of 2–3 months from the date of your return for the charges to be posted to your account. Therefore we ask that you use a card that will not expire in the 2–3 months following your return.

**Please note:** *Optional tour prices include gratuities for local guides and motorcoach drivers, are listed in U.S. dollar estimates determined at the time of publication, and are subject to change. Optional tours may vary.*

### **Folk Art of Oaxaca**

(Day 9 \$65 per person)

Learn about two distinctly Oaxacan craft traditions today on a full-day optional tour. First, travel to the town of San Martin Tilcajete to learn about the secrets of the *alebrijes*, fantastically-colored wooden animals carved from the pliant wood of the copal tree into the shape of mythical creatures. You'll see how these delicate crafts are made during a demonstration from local artist, and enjoy the opportunity to browse a collection of finished works.

After lunch in San Martin Tilcajete (included in the cost of your optional tour), you'll travel to the village of San Bartolo Coyotepec, famous for the production of black clay pottery. Meet a master artisan to learn more about the extreme level of skill and precision that goes into the creation of black clay pottery, and examine the vital role it has come to play in the local economy of the region.



## PRE-TRIP

### Mexico's Colonial Highlands: San Miguel de Allende & Querétaro

#### INCLUDED IN YOUR PRICE

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- » **Accommodations** for 5 nights
- » **10 meals:** 5 breakfasts, 3 lunches, 2 dinners
- » **9 included tours:** San Miguel de Allende, El Mirador, Guanajuato, Querétaro, Querétaro Regional Museum, Bernal, Dairy farm visit
- » Exclusive services of a Grand Circle Program Director
- » **Gratuities** for local guides and motorcoach drivers on your extension and all optional tours
- » All transfers

#### PRE-TRIP EXTENSION ITINERARY

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*Travel deep into the heart of Mexico's rugged central highlands, where the Cry of Dolores first rang, sparking the earliest fires of Mexican independence, to discover a trio of alluring cities, just beginning to earn their fame in the travel scene. Explore San Miguel de Allende, Mexico's "Rainbow City," known for its brightly-colored colonial architecture and infectious spirit of celebration. Enjoy a day trip to Guanajuato, a former mining town that is still relatively undiscovered by American travelers, and explore Queretaro, a modern-day boom town with an immaculately-preserved historic core.*

##### Day 1 Depart U.S. • Arrive San Miguel de Allende, Mexico

- Destination: San Miguel de Allende
- Accommodations: Posada de la Aldea or similar

**Morning/Afternoon:** Board your flight to Mexico, arriving in Guanajuato, where a Grand Circle representative will meet you at the airport. You'll then transfer by motorcoach to San Miguel de Allende and check in to your hotel, where the rest of the day is at leisure.

**Dinner/Evening:** Yours to spend as you please, with dinner on your own. Ask your Program Director for restaurant recommendations.

##### Day 2 Explore San Miguel de Allende

- Destination: San Miguel de Allende
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner
- Accommodations: Posada de la Aldea or similar

**Breakfast:** At the hotel.

**Morning:** Awaken this morning and begin your discoveries of San Miguel de Allende. Once a sleepy colonial town in the central Mexican highlands, this city has blossomed into a world-renowned travel destination, and was recognized as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2008. With its winding cobblestone streets, candy-hued buildings infused with the colors of sunset, and a spirit of *fiesta* that seems to

fill the air throughout the year, San Miguel de Allende exudes an aura of romance that casts a spell on locals and visitors alike.

You'll discover the city's charm for yourself on an included walking tour of its sights, beginning in *El Jardín*, the central plaza where many of its most historic buildings are located. Witness the *Parroquia de San Miguel Arcángel*, often referred to as the "Pink Church," for the color of its neo-Gothic façade and sky-piercing spires. You'll also stop outside the *Casa de Allende*, the childhood home of Ignacio Allende, namesake of the city and a hero from the Mexican War of Independence.

During your tour, you'll pause to relax and enjoy some local refreshments as you snack on *churros* and hot chocolate, a popular Mexican confection. Then, your tour continues as you discover the Church of San Francisco, notable for its *churrigueresque* (a particularly elaborate Spanish Baroque architectural style) façade, contrasted by its more traditional bell tower, a contradiction that reflects the evolution of aesthetic sensibilities that took place over its 20-year construction. Finally, you'll visit the city's Artisan Market, where a dizzying variety of jewelry, colorful clothing, handpainted ceramics, and other wares are put on display by the many skilled painters and craft workers that live in the city.

**Lunch:** On your own. Ask your Program Director for restaurant recommendations.

**Afternoon:** You'll have a few hours after lunch to relax or explore at leisure. Late this afternoon, you'll ride by motorcoach to *El Mirador*, a scenic overlook offering panoramic views of the entire city. Here, you'll be treated to one of San Miguel de Allende's most memorable sights as the sun sets over the city, setting it aglow in the dusky evening light. You'll then ride back to the city, where you will have time to refresh before dinner.

**Dinner:** Enjoy dinner together this evening at a local restaurant in San Miguel de Allende.

**Evening:** Spend the remainder of the evening as you wish.

### Day 3 San Miguel de Allende • Visit Guanajuato

- Destination: San Miguel de Allende
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch
- Accommodations: Posada de la Aldea or similar

**Breakfast:** At the hotel.

**Morning:** Travel by motorcoach this morning to discover Guanajuato, a UNESCO World Heritage Site located about two hours to the west of San Miguel de Allende. Guanajuato was founded by Spanish colonists in 1559 to mine the rich deposits of silver and gold in the nearby mountains. By the 18th century it became the world's leading producer of silver, and its prosperity from this period can still be seen in the baroque and neoclassical architecture of its historic center. Guanajuato would also play a vital role in Mexico's fight for independence, the earliest sparks of rebellion having been struck in this rugged region.

Modern Guanajuato is a beautiful, but lesser-traveled gem of Mexico's central highlands, drawing fewer international visitors than San Miguel de Allende, Guadalajara, or other nearby hotspots. A disorderly sprawl of pastel-colored dwellings creep their way up the surrounding foothills; its winding cobblestone streets, too narrow for cars to pass, lie above a network of subterranean roads; but there's beauty to the chaos, as you'll discover during today's included tour.

First, enjoy a funicular ride to the summit of *Mirador el Pipila*, where you can enjoy a 360-degree panorama of the cityscape below. You'll also find a monument dedicated to El

Pipila, the nickname of the young miner who stormed the gates of the local Spanish garrison and fueled the fire of revolution 200 years ago. Then, stop at the Jardin Union, a triangular park lined with restaurants and frequented by mariachi bands and street musicians eager to take requests from passersby. You'll also stop outside the nearby Teatro Juarez, an eclectically-designed 19th century theater whose façade is designed to resemble the Pantheon of Rome, and is adorned with eight bronze statues of Greek mythological figures. Then, you'll board a trolley for a one-hour panoramic tour through the historic streets of Guanajuato.

**Lunch:** After your tour, enjoy an included lunch with your fellow travelers at a local restaurant.

**Afternoon:** You'll have about an hour of free time after lunch to spend in Guanajuato as you please. You may wish to stroll through the Plaza de San Fernando, a popular gathering place and performance space for Guanajuato residents, surrounded by some particularly well-preserved historic architecture. You also may like to visit *Callejon del Beso* (Alley of the Kiss), a narrow passageway named after a pair of star-crossed lovers whose passion was doomed to never be. Legend has it that couples who share a kiss while standing on the third step of the alleyway will be blessed with seven years of happiness. Then, you'll return to San Miguel de Allende, where the rest of the day is at leisure.

**Dinner/Evening:** Continue making independent discoveries this evening, with dinner on your own. Ask your Program Director for restaurant recommendations.

## Day 4 San Miguel de Allende • Explore Querétaro • Querétaro Regional Museum

- Destination: Queretaro
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch
- Accommodations: Gran Hotel Queretaro or similar

**Breakfast:** At the hotel.

**Morning:** Depart your hotel and begin your transfer to Querétaro, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, and your next destination.

Querétaro's history is rare amongst colonial cities in that its Spanish inhabitants lived in relative harmony alongside their indigenous neighbors. Like the other cities of the highlands, Queretaro was also one of the first battlegrounds in Mexico's fight for independence from Spain, and would even serve as the nascent nation's capital several times over the following centuries. Modern Queretaro is a city on the grow, with a booming population of more than one million, and a burgeoning industrial and technological sector.

But for all of its rapid growth, its historic city center retains a timeless charm, as you'll discover during an included walking tour around noon. Wander amongst the highlights of the city, including the Pantheon of Illustrious Querétanos, which pays homage to prominent figures of the movement of Mexican independence—most notably, the remains of Josefa Ortiz de Domínguez (nicknamed *La Corregidora*), who helped spark the revolution, are entombed here.

You'll also see a portion of the city's stone aqueduct, built in the 18th century to supply drinking water to the city—today, the aqueduct still functions, feeding the many bubbling fountains that dot the city center. Then, stop by the Zenea Garden, a resplendent green



space in the city center, bedecked with colorful flowers and a statue of Hebe, the Greek goddess of youth.

Finally, you'll see the Government Palace, which currently functions as the administrative seat of the city, and was also the center of much conspiracy and intrigue in the years leading up to the Mexican War of Independence.

**Lunch:** Enjoy an included lunch at a local restaurant after your walking tour.

**Afternoon:** Learn more about local history during an included tour of the Regional Museum of Querétaro, housed inside the red walls of the former Convent of San Francisco, a striking example of the city's early colonial architecture. You'll tour the museum's exhibits, which trace the region's history, from its pre-Hispanic indigenous cultures, to the war of independence, to the modern day.

After your tour, you'll check in to your hotel. The rest of the day is yours to spend at leisure.

**Dinner/Evening:** Continue making independent discoveries this evening, with dinner on your own. Ask your Program Director for restaurant recommendations.

### Day 5 Querétaro • Dairy farm visit

- Destination: Queretaro
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner
- Accommodations: Gran Hotel Queretaro or similar

**Breakfast:** At the hotel.

**Morning:** The green hillsides surrounding Querétaro are dotted with orchards, cornfields, and dairy farms with grazing animals. This morning you will visit Rancho Santa Marina, a family-owned farm that produces a variety of delicious cheeses made from goat and sheep's milk. You'll tour the farm and learn about each

step of the production process, as well as the role that farms like this one play in the local economy. You will also have the opportunity to sample some freshly made cheese produced here, along with some freshly baked bread and local wine. After the tour you will return to Querétaro.

**Lunch:** On your own in Querétaro. Ask your program Director for restaurant recommendations.

**Afternoon:** You have the afternoon free to relax or to continue exploring Querétaro on your own.

**Dinner:** Join your fellow travelers for an included dinner at a local restaurant.

**Evening:** You have the freedom to spend the rest of your evening as you wish—ask your Program Director for recommendations.

### Day 6 Visit Bernal • Transfer to Mexico City

- Destination: Mexico City
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

**Breakfast:** At the hotel.

**Morning:** Depart Querétaro this morning for your transfer to Mexico City. Along the way, you will enjoy an included tour of Bernal, one of Mexico's *Pueblos Magicos* (Magical Towns). The star attraction here is the Peña de Bernal, a volcanic stone monolith—the tallest in the world—that some claim is infused with a magical energy that bestows a blessing of calm upon those who see it. Indeed, the pace of life in Bernal is a little slower than in Mexico's big cities, which you can experience for yourself during a short walking tour.

**Lunch:** Enjoy an included lunch at a local restaurant in Bernal.

**Afternoon:** Arrive at your hotel in Mexico City, where you'll begin your *Cultural Capitals & Ancient Heritage: Mexico City to Oaxaca* vacation.

## POST-TRIP

### The Yucatán Peninsula: Campeche & Mérida

#### INCLUDED IN YOUR PRICE

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- » **Accommodations** for 5 nights
- » **9 meals:** 5 breakfasts, 3 lunches, and 1 dinner
- » **6 included tours:** Campeche, Mayan Architectural Museum, Uxmal, Mérida, Cenote experience, Chichén Itzá
- » Exclusive services of a Grand Circle Program Director
- » **Gratuities** for local guides and motorcoach drivers on your extension and all optional tours
- » All transfers

#### POST-TRIP EXTENSION ITINERARY

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*Discover the enchanting beauty of the Yucatan Peninsula, a stunning blend of natural beauty, ancient Mayan cities, and Spanish colonial architecture. Come explore some of its highlights as you discover Campeche, including its historic walled core and laid-back waterfront; immerse yourself in the diverse cultural offerings of Merida, “The White City,” and ponder the mysteries of Chichen Itza, left behind by the ancient Mayans.*

##### Day 1 Oaxaca • Fly to Campeche

- Destination: Campeche
- Included Meals: Dinner
- Accommodations: Gamma Campeche Malecon or similar

**Morning:** Transfer to the airport for your flight to Campeche.

**Lunch:** On your own. You can pick something up at the airport or wait until you arrive at your hotel in Campeche.

**Afternoon:** You'll arrive at your hotel this afternoon, where you'll discover the surrounding neighborhood on an orientation walk with your Program Director.

**Dinner:** Gather with your fellow travelers for an included dinner tonight.

**Evening:** The rest of your evening is at leisure. Your Program Director can recommend activities if you'd like to explore independently.

##### Day 2 Explore Campeche • Visit Mayan Architectural Museum

- Destination: Campeche
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch
- Accommodations: Gamma Campeche Malecon or similar

**Breakfast:** At the hotel.

**Morning:** Begin your discoveries of Campeche today. This region of the Yucatán was once a thriving center of the Mayan civilization, and the artifacts of their heyday can still be found dotting the landscape today. Their population suffered a mysterious decline by the time the Spanish arrived, who built a port city which quickly grew prosperous under the trade of red dye, harvested from the logwood trees

that are native to the region. This wealth also made Campeche a favorite target of the pirates that plagued the Caribbean, leading to the construction of fortifications in the city's walled, historic core. These ramparts still stand today, earning it recognition as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

You'll discover the historic city center for yourself on today's included tour. You'll ride by trolley through Campeche's charming cobblestone streets, lined with pastel-color facades, gaily painted in every color of the rainbow. Witness the well-preserved Fort San Miguel, whose cannons still maintain their watch over the sea from behind their stone parapets, and visit the charming boardwalk, where locals and travelers alike stroll amiably by the waterfront.

**Lunch:** Enjoy an included lunch at a local restaurant.

**Afternoon:** Your tour continues at the Mayan Architectural Museum, which details the history of the people who lived in this region long before the Spanish arrived. Ponder the mysteries of this pre-Hispanic civilization as you browse the educational exhibits and marvel at the artifacts on display, unearthed from the many Mayan ruins that dot the Yucatán Peninsula.

After your tour, you'll return to your hotel where the rest of the day is at leisure. Perhaps you'll visit Campeche's botanical garden, a small green space built inside the city walls. The garden features more than 200 varieties of subtropical flora, including a noteworthy specimen of the ceiba tree, which held a sacred place in Mayan culture. Or, you might choose to find a rooftop terrace to watch the sunset.

**Dinner/Evening:** Continue making independent discoveries this evening, with dinner on your own. Ask your Program Director for restaurant recommendations.

### Day 3 Visit Uxmal • Transfer to Mérida

- Destination: Merida
- Included Meals: Breakfast
- Accommodations: Holiday Inn Merida or similar

**Breakfast:** At the hotel.

**Morning:** Begin your transfer to Mérida this morning, stopping on the way for a tour of the ancient city of Uxmal, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, and one of the most important Maya settlements in the Yucatán.

A veritable treasure-trove of pre-Hispanic culture and history, the layout of Uxmal's temples, platforms, and other buildings reveal the ancient Maya's understanding of astronomy. Many of the buildings are decorated with a profusion of intricate carvings, which tell the story of the Maya's culture. Most notably featured is Chaac, the god of rain, who was particularly revered by the city, as it lacked its own water source.

Dominating the ancient cityscape are its pre-Hispanic pyramids, the tallest of these being the *Piramide del Adivino* (Pyramid of the Magician). The creation of this particular monument is where Uxmal gets its name—meaning “thrice built”—as it was constructed in three phases. As you gaze up at this towering spectacle, it is easy to imagine the sacred importance this city once held in the ancient world. These days, its sole inhabitants are giant iguanas, which you may see sunning themselves atop the crumbling temples.

**Lunch:** After your tour of Uxmal, you'll have time to enjoy lunch independently.

**Afternoon:** Continue your transfer to Mérida, arriving at your hotel later this afternoon. You'll have some free time to relax, followed by an evening orientation walk through your neighborhood.

**Dinner/Evening:** You have the freedom to spend the rest of the evening as you wish, with dinner on your own. Ask your Program Director for recommendations.

#### Day 4 Mérida • Visit Chichén Itzá

- Destination: Merida
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch
- Accommodations: Holiday Inn Merida or similar

**Breakfast:** At the hotel.

**Morning:** This morning, the mysterious ruins of Chichén Itzá beckon you. Depart for an included tour of the UNESCO World Heritage site that contains the massive step pyramid known as *El Castillo* (the castle)—named one of the New Seven Wonders of the World in 2007. Once a seat of power in the ancient world, the site now attracts millions of visitors every year who come to admire the city's spectacular and beautifully preserved ruins.

The Maya people were exceptionally advanced: They were skilled farmers, astronomers, and developed what may have been the first written language native to the Americas. They were also great mathematicians and were the first to develop the concept of zero—a theory that had eluded the ancient Greeks.

Another striking feature of Chichén Itzá is its enormous ball court. Measuring 225 feet wide and 545 feet long, the remains—known as The Great Ballcourt—are the largest ever discovered in Mesoamerica. While no record of the rules of this ancient game exist today, the carvings on the court's stone walls reveal images of players carrying the ball with their hands; the ball itself

being a little larger than a basketball and made of solid rubber. The sheer size of the court alone gives insight into how significant these games were to ancient Maya culture.

**Lunch:** Enjoy an included lunch at a local restaurant, conveniently located adjacent to the ruins.

**Afternoon:** Return to Mérida, where the rest of the day is at leisure. You may want to visit the Mérida Museum of Anthropology, housed in one of the gracious mansions on Montejo Boulevard. Here, you can see Chichén Itzá artifacts, and displays showing how the pre-Hispanic Mayans deformed the skulls and crossed the eyes of their babies in a quest to create more beautiful people. You also might choose to return to the *zocalo* to spend some time enjoying everyday life in Mérida on your own.

**Dinner/Evening:** Continue making independent discoveries this evening, with dinner on your own. Ask your Program Director for restaurant recommendations.

#### Day 5 Explore Mérida • Cenote experience

- Destination: Merida
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch
- Accommodations: Holiday Inn Merida or similar

**Breakfast:** At the hotel.

**Morning:** Discover Mérida, known as “The White City,” during an included walking tour. Famous for its charming white-washed buildings and exquisite Spanish colonial architecture Mérida also features a wealth of cultural offerings.

First, discover the city's cathedral, built upon the site of (and utilizing some of the stones from) a former Maya temple. Then, discover stately Casa de Montejo, the 16th-century



home of the father and son who brought the Yucatán peninsula under colonial control. Although it was converted to a bank decades ago, its exquisite, French-style architectural details remain untouched.

End your city tour at Mérida's tree-lined *zócalo*, where locals meet, socialize and conduct business.

Then, set off for a tour of a local cenote. A cenote is a natural swimming hole formed by the collapse of porous limestone bedrock, revealing a subterranean groundwater pool or pools. The Mayans cherished these sources of fresh, potable water; to a modern traveler, they represent a welcome reprieve from the heat of the Yucatán sun, and unique opportunity to swim, and even snorkel, for an up-close look at the stalagmites that lie beneath surface of the water.

**Lunch:** Enjoy an included lunch with your fellow travelers at a local restaurant.

**Afternoon:** Your afternoon is at leisure to relax or explore independently.

**Dinner/Evening:** You have the freedom to spend the rest of the evening as you wish, with dinner on your own. Ask your Program Director for recommendations.

## **Day 6 Mérida • Return to U.S.**

- Included Meals: Breakfast

**Breakfast:** At the hotel.

**Morning:** Transfer to the airport for your flight home.

# TRAVEL DOCUMENTS & ENTRY REQUIREMENTS

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## Your Passport

- Must be in good condition
- Must be valid for at least 6 months after your scheduled return to the U.S.
- Must have the required number of blank pages (details below)
- The blank pages must be labeled “Visas” at the top. Pages labeled “Amendments and Endorsements” are not acceptable

## Need to Renew Your Passport?

Contact the National Passport Information Center (NPIC) at **1-877-487-2778**, or visit the U.S. Department of State’s official website at **[www.travel.state.gov](http://www.travel.state.gov)** for information on obtaining a new passport or renewing your existing passport. The U.S. Department of State allows for passport renewal by mail or, for applicable citizens, renewal online. We advise you review the process and requirements for online passport renewal on the official website.

You may also contact our recommended visa service company, PVS International, at **1-800-556-9990** for help with your passport.

## Recommended Blank Pages

Please confirm that your passport has enough blank pages for this vacation.

- **Main trip only:** You will need 2 blank passport pages.
- **Optional pre- and/or post-trip extensions:** No additional pages needed.

## No Visas Required

Travelers with a U.S. passport do not need any visas for this vacation, including the optional trip extensions.

## Traveling Without a U.S. Passport?

If you are not a U.S. citizen, or if your passport is from any country other than the U.S., it is your responsibility to check with your local consulate, embassy, or a visa services company about visa requirements. We recommend the services of PVS International, a national visa service located in Washington D.C.; they can be reached at **1-800-556-9990** or **[www.pvsinternational.org](http://www.pvsinternational.org)**.

## Traveling With a Minor?

Traveling with a minor may require certain documentation for border crossings. For further detail on the required documentation, please contact the local embassy or state government.

## **Emergency Photocopies of Key Documents**

We recommend you carry color photocopies of key documents including the photo page of your passport plus any applicable visas, air itinerary, credit cards (front and back), and an alternative form of ID. Add emergency phone numbers like your credit card company and the number for your travel protection plan. Store copies separate from the originals.

If you plan to email this information to yourself, please keep in mind that email is not always secure; consider using password protection or encryption. Also email is not always available worldwide. As an alternative, you could load these documents onto a flash drive instead, which can do double-duty as a place to backup photos during your trip.

## **Overseas Taxes & Fees**

This tour may have taxes and fees that cannot be included in your airline ticket price because you are required to pay them in person onsite. All taxes are subject to change without notice and can be paid in cash (either U.S. or local currency). If applicable, you will receive a list of these fees with your Final Documents.

## RIGORS, VACCINES & GENERAL HEALTH

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### Keep Your Abilities In Mind

**Please review the information below prior to departing on this trip.** We reserve the right for our Program Directors to modify participation, or in some circumstances send travelers home if their limitations are impacting the group's experience.

#### GROUP SIZE

- A maximum of 42 travelers, led by a local Grand Circle Program Director

#### PACING

- 3 locations in 12 days
- 1 day features 6-8 hours of travel by motorcoach
- Air travel time will be 2-8 hours and will most likely have one connection

#### PHYSICAL REQUIREMENTS

- Walk 2 miles unassisted and participate in 2 hours of physical activities daily, including stairs, steep hills, and cobblestones
- Mexico's pre-Hispanic ruins may require navigating steep steps without railings and uneven terrain
- Not accessible for travelers using wheelchairs, scooters, walkers, crutches, or other mobility aids
- We reserve the right for Program Directors to restrict participation, or in some circumstances send travelers home, if their limitations impact the group's experience

#### TERRAIN & TRANSPORTATION

- Uneven walking surfaces, including unpaved paths, hills, stairs, and cobblestones
- Travel by 45-seat motorcoach, cable car, chair lift, and two 20-person boats

#### CLIMATE

- Daytime temperatures range from 75-105°F during touring season
- March-May are the warmest months

#### Warning: Stairs

Much of this trip entails visiting ruins, which often have old stairs that are steep, uneven, and without handrails. In order to get the most out of your trip, you should be capable of climbing and descending several flights of these "historic condition" stairs without assistance.



## Health Check

Feeling healthy and confident of your mobility is essential to fully enjoy your trip. If you have ongoing medical conditions or concerns about your health, we highly recommend that you schedule a checkup with your personal physician at least six weeks in advance of your departure date.

- Discuss with your doctor any aspects of your itinerary that may affect your health and be guided by his or her advice. (You can use the “Keep Your Abilities in Mind” on the previous page as a guideline to discuss with him or her.)
- You may want to have a dental exam before your trip. A loose filling or developing cavity would be difficult to remedy while you are traveling.
- If you have a condition that requires special equipment or treatment, you must bring and be responsible for all necessary items related to your condition.

## No Vaccines Required

### Recommended Vaccines

At the time of writing there were no required vaccines for this trip. The CDC recommends that all travelers be up to date on their routine vaccinations and on basic travel vaccines like Hepatitis A and Typhoid, but these are suggestions only. However, this could change in future so we encourage you to check with the CDC yourself before meeting with your doctor.

### Anti-Malaria Medication: Ask Your Doctor

At time of writing, the CDC said that the overall risk of malaria was very low in Mexico, but that there had been cases in some of the places we’ll visit on the optional extensions (such as Campeche). Ask your doctor if they recommend anti-malarial medication for you—they may advise against it because of the side effects. Keep in mind that you can also fight malaria by preventing insect bites, so you may be better off bringing insect repellent rather than medication.

## Traveling with Medications

- **Pack medications in your carry-on bag** to avoid loss and to have them handy.
- **Keep medicines in their original, labeled containers** for a quicker security screen at the airport and a better experience if you get stopped by customs while overseas.
- **Bring copies of your prescriptions**, written using the generic drug name rather than a brand name to be prepared for any unforeseen loss of your medications.

We recommend checking with the State Department for medication restrictions by country: [travel.state.gov](https://travel.state.gov) (Select “Find International Travel Information” then select “Country Information”; if you don’t see any medications specifically mentioned under the “Your Health Abroad” section, then you can presume major U.S. brands should be OK).

## Limits on Over-the-Counter Medications

According to the U.S. Embassy in Mexico, over-the-counter medicines with pseudoephedrine (such as Actifed, Sudafed, and Vicks inhalers) or codeine are prohibited in Mexico. For more information, see the embassy website at <https://mx.usembassy.gov/> and search for “bringing medication”.

## Staying Healthy on Your Trip

### Jet Lag Tips

- Start your trip well-rested.
- Begin a gradual transition to your new time zone before you leave or switch to your destination time zone when you get on the plane.
- Attempt to sleep and eat according to the new schedule.
- Avoid heavy eating and drinking caffeine or alcoholic beverages right before—and during—your flight.
- Drink plenty of water and/or fruit juice while flying
- Stretch your legs, neck, and back periodically while seated on the plane.
- After arrival, avoid the temptation to nap.
- Don’t push yourself to see a lot on your first day.
- Try to stay awake your first day until after dinner.

### Allergies

If you have any serious allergies or dietary restrictions, we advise you to notify us at least 30 days prior to your departure. Please call our Travel Counselors at **1-800-321-2835**, and we will communicate them to our regional office. Every effort will be made to accommodate you.

### Water

- Tap water is not safe to drink in Mexico, although some hotels will offer filtered water on their property.
- Unless you are told differently by your Program Director—who will know about each specific hotel— please avoid tap water, drinks with ice, or salad (it may have been washed in tap water).
- We recommend that you use bottled water instead, which is widely available for purchase. Your Program Director will provide you with one bottle of water every day.
- When buying bottled water, inspect each bottle before you buy it to make sure the cap is sealed properly.

- To fight dehydration, carry a bottle in your daypack at all times.

## Food

- We've carefully chosen the restaurants for your group meals, and fresh fruits and salads at our group meals are generally as safe as in restaurants in the U.S. Your Program Director can suggest restaurants for the meals you take on your own.
- When dining out independently, watch what you eat and drink.
- If you have any serious allergies or dietary restrictions, you will need to choose and select which meals best accommodate your needs.
- Avoid uncooked food, any food sold by street vendors, and non-pasteurized milk and milk products.
- Fruit that you peel yourself is usually safe.

## High Altitude

On average, Mexico City is at 7,382 feet above sea level—which is just below the point where most people start to feel elevation sickness (8,000 feet). However:

- If you have never traveled to high elevations before, or
- If you know that high elevations affect you, or
- If you've had heart /breathing trouble before,

Then you should ask your doctor if they recommend medication for altitude sickness.

## Air Pollution

Mexico City has a reputation for air pollution that is only somewhat deserved. In the 1990s, the pollution was bad, but subsequent measures by city government have greatly improved the situation. That said, travelers should be prepared for a few hazy days (especially in the winter). And any traveler with sensitivity to pollution or soot should take precautions (i.e. bring an extra inhaler—but NOT one with pseudoephedrine—pack a face mask, etc.).

# MONEY MATTERS: LOCAL CURRENCY & TIPPING GUIDELINES

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## Top Three Tips

- **Carry a mix of different types of payments**, such as local currency, an ATM card, and a credit card
- **Traveler's checks are not recommended.** They can be difficult to exchange and the commission fee for cashing them is quite high. It's more practical to view them as a last resort in the event of a special situation.
- **You will not be able to pay with U.S. dollars on this trip;** you will need local currency instead.

## Local Currency

For current exchange rates, please refer to an online converter tool like [www.xe.com/currencyconverter](http://www.xe.com/currencyconverter), your bank, or the financial section of your newspaper.

**Mexico:** Mexican peso (\$)

## How to Exchange Money

If you want to exchange money before your trip, you can usually do so through your bank or at an exchange office. Your departure airport in the U.S., a travel agent, or an AAA office are also possible outlets. Or you can wait and change money on the trip instead—but it might be helpful to arrive with some local currency in case you run into a bank holiday or an “out of order” ATM.

On your trip, the easiest way is to withdraw funds from a local ATM. The ATM will give you local money and your bank at home will convert that into U.S. dollars.

You can also exchange cash at some hotels, airports, large post offices, and money exchange offices. To exchange cash, you'll usually need your passport and bills in good condition (not worn, torn, or dirty). New bills (post 2004) are best. Never exchange money on the street. All exchange methods involve fees, which may be built into the conversion rate; ask beforehand.

## ATMs

When using the ATM, keep in mind that it may only accept cards from local banks, and may not allow cash advances on credit cards; you might need to try more than one ATM or more than one card.

Many banks charge a fee of \$1-\$5 each time you use an out-of-network ATM. Others may charge you a percentage of the amount you withdraw. We recommend that you check with your bank before you depart.

Lastly, don't forget to memorize the actual digits of your card's PIN number (many keypads do not include letters on their keys—they only display numbers.)



## Credit & Debit Cards

Even if you don't plan on using a credit card during your trip, we still suggest that you bring one or two as a backup, especially if you are planning a large purchase (artwork, jewelry). We also suggest that you bring more than one brand of card (i.e. Visa, MasterCard, American Express) if possible, because not every shop will take every card. For example, although the Discover card is accepted in some countries outside the U.S., it is not widely adopted, so other brands will work at a much larger range of stores, restaurants, etc.

**Mexico:** Major American credit cards are accepted in Mexico, but you may be charged an additional 2–6% for using a credit card. Cards are not widely accepted in markets and some shops, which may be cash only.

## Notify Card Providers of Upcoming Travel

Many credit card companies and banks have fraud alert departments that will freeze your card if they see suspicious charges—such as charges or withdrawals from another country. To avoid an accidental security block, it is a good idea to notify your credit card company and/or bank you will be using your cards abroad. You can do this by calling their customer service number a week or two before your departure. Some banks or credit card companies will also let you do this online.

You should also double-check what phone number you could call if you have a problem with a card while you are abroad. Don't assume you can use the 1-800 number printed on the back of your card—most 1 800 numbers don't work outside of the U.S.!

## Tipping Guidelines

Of course, whether you tip, and how much, is always at your own discretion. But for those of you who have asked for tipping suggestions, we offer these guidelines. To make it easy for you to budget, we have quoted the amounts in U.S. dollars; tips can be converted and paid in local currency or in U.S. dollars.

- **Grand Circle Program Director:** It is customary to express a personal “thank you” to your GCT Program Director at the end of your trip. As a guideline, many travelers give \$6–\$8 per traveler for each day their Program Director is with them. *Please note that tips for your Program Director can only be in the form of cash. If you are taking any of the optional extensions, your Program Director during the extension(s) may not be the same as the one on your main trip.*
- **Hotel Housekeeping:** Many travelers will leave the equivalent of \$1–\$2 per day, per room for the hotel housekeeping staff.
- **Included in Your Trip Price:** Gratuities are included for local guides and motorcoach drivers on your main trip, extensions, and all optional tours.

## Time at Leisure

When you are exploring on your own, it's useful to know when to tip and how much, because local customs often differ from the U.S. Here are a few helpful guidelines for the most common services a traveler might use:

- **Taxis:** Tipping is not expected unless the driver provided some sort of extra service.
- **Restaurants, cafes, and bars:** Waiters expect a 15% cash tip unless a service fee is included on the bill.

## AIR, OPTIONAL TOURS & STAYING IN TOUCH

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### Land Only Travelers & Personalized Air

#### Quick Definitions

- **Land Only:** You will be booking your own international flights. Airport transfers are not included.
- **Air-Inclusive:** You booked international air with us. Airport transfers are included as long as you didn't customize your trip's dates (see next bullet).
- **Personalized Air:** You booked international air with us, and have customized it in some way. If you have customized your trip's dates to arrive early, stay longer, or stop on your own in a connecting city, airport transfers will NOT be included. You must also arrange your own accommodations for any additional nights. For your convenience, a preliminary list of your included hotels is available on your My Planner at [www.gct.com/myplanner](http://www.gct.com/myplanner) under "My Reservations".

#### Air Inclusive Travelers

If you have purchased air with Grand Circle Travel, there are some points that may be helpful for you to know.

- **Departure:** If you are among a group of ten or more Grand Circle travelers who depart the U.S. from your gateway city, it is our goal to have a Grand Circle Representative assist you at the U.S. airport with the check-in of your flight. Unless there are extenuating circumstances beyond our control, the Representative will be at the check-in counter three hours before your departure time.
- **Arrival:** Once you arrive, you'll need to collect your luggage and clear customs. A Grand Circle Representative will meet you outside of customs and assist you with your transfer to the hotel or ship. Important note on porters: Airport porters are NOT allowed in the baggage claim area. On arrival, you must take your luggage off the baggage carousel and load it onto a cart, which you will then move through customs. When you exit customs, you'll handle your cart until reaching your transfer vehicle. Your driver will load your luggage into the transfer vehicle.
- **Flight Delays:** Grand Circle Travel is not responsible for flight delays or cancellations. In the unfortunate circumstance that your flight is delayed or changed, please try to reach the regional Grand Circle office (their number will be in your Final Documents) in order to make new arrangements for your transfer. Due to airline regulations our staff is not notified of flight rerouting, and our local representative won't necessarily be aware of your new arrival time. In these cases you will need to arrange your transfer by taxi to your hotel.

- **Return:** If you are among a group of ten or more Grand Circle travelers who return to the same U.S. gateway city, a Grand Circle Representative will meet you as you exit Customs and help you find taxis, buses, hotel accommodations, or connecting flights. Again, it is our goal to have our Grand Circle Representative waiting to assist your group. In rare instances, unforeseen circumstances may prevent this service.
- **Flying with a Travel Companion:** If you're traveling with a companion from a different household, and both of you are beginning and ending your trip at the same airport on the same dates, let us know you'd like to travel together and we'll make every effort to arrange this (please note, however, that this is not always possible). If you request any changes to your flights, please be sure that both you and your companion tell us that you still want to fly together.
- **Selecting Your Seats:** If your airline allows pre-assigned seats, you will be able to select and view them directly from the airline's website after booking. Some airlines will not allow seat confirmation until your reservation is ticketed 45–30 days prior to departure, and/or they may charge a nominal fee. You may locate your itinerary on an airline's website utilizing the Record Locator Number found on the Air Itinerary in your My Planner.

## Airport Transfers Can Be Purchased

For eligible flights, airport transfers may be purchased separately as an optional add-on, subject to availability. To be eligible, your flight(s) must meet the following requirements:

- You must fly into or fly home from the same airport as GCT travelers who purchased included airfare.
- Your flight(s) must arrive/depart on the same day that the group arrives or departs.

Airport transfers can be purchased up to 45 days prior to your departure; they are not available for purchase onsite. To learn more, or purchase airport transfers, please call our Travel Counselors at **1-800-321-2835**.

If you don't meet the requirements above, you'll need to make your own transfer arrangements. We suggest the Rome to Rio website as a handy resource: **[www.rome2rio.com](http://www.rome2rio.com)**

## Optional Tours

Optional tours are additional add-on tours that allow you to personalize your vacation by tailoring it to your tastes and needs. And if you decide not to join an optional tour? Then you'll have free time to relax or explore on your own—it's about options, not obligations.

## What You Need to Know

- All optional tours are subject to change and availability.



- Optional tours that are reserved with your Program Director can be paid for using credit/debit cards only. We accept MasterCard, Visa, and Discover credit cards; we can also take MasterCard or Visa debit cards as long as the card allows you to sign for purchases. (You won't be able to enter a PIN.)
- To ensure that you are charged in U.S. dollars, your payment will be processed by our U.S. headquarters in Boston. This process can take up to three months, so we ask that you only use a card that will still be valid three months after your trip is over. The charge may appear on your credit card statement as being from Boston, MA or may be labeled as "OPT Boston".
- Your Program Director will give you details on the optional tours while you're on the trip. But if you'd like to look over descriptions of them earlier, you can do so at any time by referring to your Day-to-Day Itinerary (available online by signing into My Planner at [www.gct.com/myplanner](http://www.gct.com/myplanner)).

## Communicating with Home from Abroad

### Cell Phones

If you want to use your cell phone on the trip, check with your phone provider to see if your phone and service will work outside of the U.S. It may turn out to be cheaper to rent an international phone or buy a SIM card onsite. If you want to use a local SIM, just make certain your phone can accept one.

### Calling Apps

We recommend you use WhatsApp while abroad to communicate home and with your Program Director while onsite. You will need a Wi-Fi connection if you do not have international coverage. Other calling options include smartphone apps such as Skype or FaceTime. You will need a Wi-Fi connection for these apps and the calls may count towards your phone plan's data allowance. Many smartphones—and some tablets or laptops—come with one of these apps pre-installed or you can download them for free from the appropriate apps store.

### Calling Cards and 1-800 Numbers

When calling the U.S. from a foreign country, a prepaid calling card can be useful because it circumvents unexpected charges from the hotel. Calling cards purchased locally are typically the best (less expensive, more likely to work with the local phones, etc.).

One reminder: Do not call U.S. 1-800 numbers outside the continental United States. This can result in costly long distance fees, since 1-800 numbers do not work outside the country.

## How to Call Overseas

When calling overseas from the U.S., dial 011 for international exchange, then the country code (indicated by a plus sign: +), and then the number. Note that foreign phone numbers may not have the same number of digits as U.S. numbers; even within a country the number of digits can vary depending on the city and if the phone is a land line or cell phone.

**Mexico:** +52

## PACKING: WHAT TO BRING & LUGGAGE LIMITS

### Luggage Limits

MAIN TRIP LIMITS	
Pieces per person	One checked bag and one carry-on bag per person.
Weight restrictions	Varies by airline. The current standard is <b>50 lbs for checked bags</b> and <b>10 lbs for carry-on bags</b> .
Size Restrictions	Varies by airline. Measured in linear inches (length+width+depth). Generally, 62 linear inches is the checked bag limit; carry-on limit is 45 linear inches.
Luggage Type	A sturdy, fabric-sided suitcase with built-in wheels and lockable zippers is recommended.
TRIP EXTENSION(S) LIMITS	
Same as the main trip.	
REMARKS/SUGGESTIONS	
<p><b>One suitcase and one carry-on bag per person:</b> Due to the space limitations on bus transfers, you'll be restricted to one suitcase and one carry-on bag per person. This is to ensure that we have room for everyone's luggage. We ask that you abide by this limit to avoid inconveniencing your fellow travelers and prevent additional airlines luggage fees (which are your responsibility). Most airlines now charge to check more than one suitcase per person for flights to Europe and other international flights.</p> <p><b>Luggage rules:</b> Luggage rules and limits are set by governmental and airline policy. Enforcement of the rules may include spot checks or may be inconsistent. However one thing is the same across the board: If you are found to have oversized or overweight luggage, you will be subject to additional fees, to be assessed by—and paid to—the airline in question.</p>	

#### Don't Forget:

- **These luggage limits may change.** If the airline(s) notify us of any changes, we will include an update in your Final Documents booklet.

- It's a good idea to reconfirm baggage restrictions and fees directly with the airline a week or so prior to departure. For your convenience, we maintain a list of the toll-free numbers for the most common airlines on our website in the FAQ section.
- **Baggage fees are not included in your trip price;** they are payable directly to the airlines.

## Your Luggage

- **Checked Luggage:** Consider a duffel bag or soft-sided suitcase. Look for one with heavy nylon fabric, wrap-around handles, built-in wheels, and a heavy duty lockable zipper. Due to space limitations on our motorcoaches, you are allowed one piece of checked luggage per person. Porterage at airports and hotels is provided for **one** bag per person. All bags should have luggage tags.
- **Carry-on Bag:** You are allowed one carry-on bag per person. We suggest a tote or small backpack that can be used as both a carry-on bag for your flight and to carry your daily necessities—water bottle, camera, etc—during your daily activities.
- **Locks:** For flights that originate in the U.S., you can either use a TSA-approved lock or leave your luggage unlocked. Outside of the U.S. we strongly recommend locking your luggage as a theft-prevention measure.

## Clothing Suggestions: Functional Tips

- **Travel light:** A good rule of thumb is to gather together everything you want to bring; then take half of that. Eliminate all but the essentials and start packing a few days before you leave. That way, you'll have time to think—not fret—about what you might be forgetting. To have a varied travel wardrobe, yet keep your luggage light, we recommend you select a color scheme and pack color-coordinated clothing items that can be mixed to create different outfits.
- **Consider clothing designed for travel, sports, or camping:** Sporting goods/outdoor stores (L.L. Bean, REI, EMS, etc.) can be a good source of lightweight, specialized, and fashionable clothing and gear that is readily adaptable to your itinerary.
- **Pack casual clothes:** Men do not need jackets or ties and women do not need fancy dresses. At most, you may want one or two “smart casual” outfits for dinner out at a nice restaurant, but it's completely up to you.
- **Good walking shoes are essential:** Negotiating the cobblestone pathways and rather uneven sidewalks can be a challenge—even for the most surefooted traveler. For your comfort and safety, you'll need supportive walking shoes that offer good traction. Light hiking boots might be useful on some days.
- **Rain gear:** You'll want good, light rain gear all year round. We suggest you bring a folding umbrella and waterproof jacket, preferably with a hood, as well as dry footwear.

## What to Bring

We have included suggestions from Program Directors and former travelers to help you pack. These packing lists are only jumping-off points—they offer recommendations based on experience, but not requirements. We recommend using [www.weather.com](http://www.weather.com) and consulting the “Climate” chapter of this handbook.

Your accommodations will supply soap, body wash, and shampoo/conditioner. If you prefer a certain brand you may want to bring your own, but otherwise you can rely on what they provide. **And don’t forget a reusable water bottle**—you’ll need it to take advantage of any refills we offer as we are working to eliminate single-use plastic bottles on all of our trips.

### Recommend Clothing

- ☐ Shirts: A mixture of short and long-sleeved shirts to layer
- ☐ Trousers, jeans, or skirts
- ☐ Comfortable walking shoes and/or water resistant shoes
- ☐ Light rain jacket/windbreaker with hood
- ☐ Sleepwear
- ☐ Socks and undergarments
- ☐ A jacket or sweater, depending on the time of year

### Essential Items

- ☐ Daily essentials: toothbrush, toothpaste, floss, hairbrush or comb, shaving items, deodorant, sunscreen, insect repellent, etc.
- ☐ Spare eyeglasses/contact lenses and your prescription
- ☐ Sunglasses with a neck strap
- ☐ Wide-brim sun hat or visor
- ☐ Compact umbrella
- ☐ Photocopies of passport, air ticket, credit cards
- ☐ Travel money bag or money belt
- ☐ Camera, spare batteries, and memory cards



## Medicines

- ☐ Your own prescription medicines
- ☐ Vitamins
- ☐ Cold remedies (but NOT with pseudoephedrine)
- ☐ Pain relievers: Ibuprofen/naproxen/aspirin
- ☐ Laxatives: Senokot/Ex-Lax
- ☐ Stomach upset: Pepto-Bismol/Mylanta
- ☐ Anti-diarrheal: Imodium
- ☐ Band-Aids, Moleskin foot pads
- ☐ Optional: Antibiotics for gastrointestinal illness
- ☐ Optional: Altitude sickness medication (for the Mexico City extension only)

**Reminder:** According to the U.S. embassy in Mexico pseudoephedrine and codeine are prohibited, so please check that your over-the-counter medications don't have these ingredients.

## Optional Gear

- ☐ Travel alarm
- ☐ Trekking poles
- ☐ Compact binoculars
- ☐ Hanging toiletry bag with pockets
- ☐ Water shoes and swimsuit if you are on the post trip extension
- ☐ Washcloth
- ☐ Hand-wash laundry soap, and maybe clothespins/travel clothesline/stopper
- ☐ Reading materials
- ☐ Travel journal/note pad
- ☐ Addresses for postcards

- ☐ Photos, small gift for Home-Hosted visit
- ☐ Travel hair dryer: Many hotels will provide hair dryers, but not all. If a hair dryer is essential to you consider a travel-size version.

## Electricity

When traveling overseas, the voltage is usually different and the plugs might not be the same shape.

### Voltage

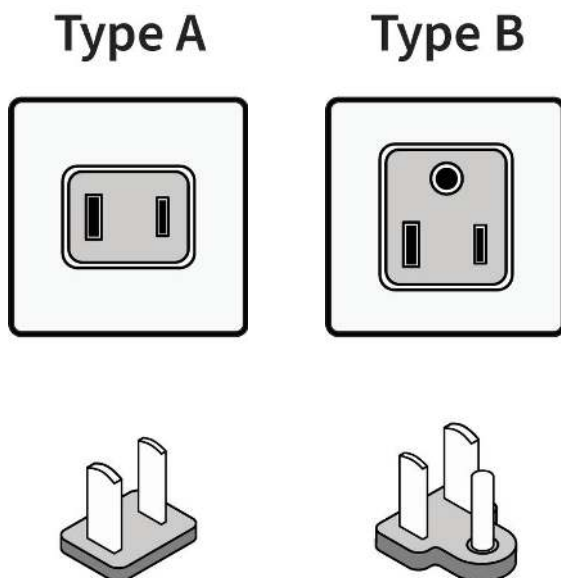
Mexico operates on the same electricity as the U.S.—110-voltage current. Your small electric appliances (shaver, camera battery charger, etc.) will operate as they do at home, although items that heat up (like hair dryers or curlers) may overheat because the electricity in Mexico cycles at a slower rate.

### Plugs

The shape of plugs will vary from country to country, and sometimes even within a country depending on when that building was built.

Different plug shapes are named by letters of the alphabet. Mexico uses Types A and B, which is the same as a standard U.S. plug. Because electric plugs in this region are American-style, you will not need an adapter.

**Mexico:** A or B (same as U.S.)



## Availability

**Electricity supply cannot be guaranteed during overnight stays.** Power outages are more common in Mexico than they are in the U.S. Travelers who are dependent on an electrical supply (as those with sleep apnea) should consider a different Grand Circle vacation.

## CLIMATE & AVERAGE TEMPERATURES

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**Mexico City, Mexico:** The city has a subtropical highland climate, with warm summers and mild winters. Summertime highs are usually in the 80s, although a heat wave may bring highs up into the 90s. In the winter, temperatures usually stay around the 60s in the day and the 40s at night. Snow is so rare that it only happens once every 20 years or so. October–May is the dry season, while June–September is considered the “rainy season”. During these months it rains on average once a day, though the rain rarely lasts longer than a few hours. Mexico City does struggle with air pollution and the city is often smoggy, with poor visibility. This air pollution is worse in the winter.

**Oaxaca, Mexico:** Oaxaca is considered a subtropical climate, meaning it has distinct dry and wet seasons like the tropics, but also has season temperature fluctuations. The dry season runs from November–March; the wet season—when thunderstorms are common—is from May–September; April and October are shoulder seasons. The warmest time of year is actually April and May, when highs in the 90s are common. The rest of the year daytime temperatures are usually in the high 70s–80s, but nighttime lows vary from 32° F (in January) to 60° F (May and June).

**Merida, Mexico:** This city lies close to the Tropic of Cancer, which means high heat and high humidity. Even when the temperature is “only” 80° F, the humidity can make it feel like 100° F. Locals have learned to work around the climate by starting their day early, taking midday break (siesta), and then going back—to work, to chores, etc.—in the late afternoon and early evening. Low temperatures are usually in the 60s. Rainfall is usually light, but more common in the summer and fall.

### Climate Averages & Online Forecast

The following charts reflect the **average** climate as opposed to exact weather conditions. This means they serve only as general indicators of what can reasonably be expected. An extreme heat wave or cold snap could fall outside these ranges. As your departure approaches, we encourage you to use **[www.weather.com](http://www.weather.com)** for a more accurate forecast of the locations you visit.

## Average Daily High/Low Temperatures (°F), Humidity & Monthly Rainfall

MONTH	MEXICO CITY, MEXICO			OAXACA, MEXICO		
	Temp. High-Low	% Relative Humidity (am-pm)	Average # of Days with Rainfall	Temp. High-Low	% Relative Humidity (am-pm)	Average # of Days with Rainfall
JAN	70 to 45	77 to 33	1	80 to 49	--	1
FEB	72 to 46	74 to 31	1	84 to 54	--	1
MAR	76 to 50	69 to 28	2	87 to 55	--	2
APR	78 to 53	71 to 28	4	89 to 58	--	4
MAY	79 to 55	76 to 31	8	88 to 60	--	8
JUN	76 to 57	82 to 42	14	84 to 60	--	13
JUL	74 to 56	85 to 45	17	83 to 59	--	11
AUG	74 to 56	85 to 43	14	83 to 59	--	12
SEP	73 to 55	85 to 46	11	82 to 59	--	12
OCT	73 to 52	84 to 40	6	82 to 58	--	5
NOV	72 to 48	81 to 36	1	81 to 53	--	1
DEC	70 to 45	81 to 34	1	80 to 51	--	1

MONTH	SAN MIGUEL DE ALLENDE, MEXICO			MERIDA, MEXICO		
	Temp. High-Low	% Relative Humidity (am-pm)	Average # of Days with Rainfall	Temp. High-Low	% Relative Humidity (am-pm)	Average # of Days with Rainfall
JAN	73 to 43	--	2	87 to 63	93 to 52	4
FEB	77 to 45	--	1	89 to 63	92 to 47	3
MAR	83 to 50	--	1	93 to 66	91 to 41	2
APR	86 to 54	--	3	96 to 68	89 to 40	2
MAY	87 to 57	--	5	97 to 71	91 to 43	5
JUN	84 to 58	--	9	96 to 71	94 to 55	11
JUL	81 to 57	--	11	95 to 71	95 to 59	13
AUG	81 to 57	--	8	95 to 70	96 to 59	13
SEP	79 to 56	--	9	94 to 71	97 to 65	14
OCT	78 to 52	--	5	91 to 69	95 to 61	10
NOV	76 to 47	--	2	89 to 67	95 to 57	5
DEC	74 to 44	--	2	87 to 64	94 to 55	4



## ABOUT YOUR DESTINATIONS: CULTURE, ETIQUETTE & MORE

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### Your Program Director

During your exclusive Grand Circle vacation, you'll have reliable assistance available at all times from an on-site Grand Circle Travel Program Director. Your Program Director is fluent in English and can give you an inside perspective on your destinations. He or she is supported along the way by local tour guides, who guide you expertly through particular sites and cities.

Many Grand Circle Program Directors are graduates of professional education programs for travel guides. In addition, they receive specialized training directly from Grand Circle, training that is based on what we've learned from thousands of past travelers about how to make the trip most enjoyable. Your Program Director offers both a deep knowledge of the region and a commitment to make this a very pleasant, informative, and rewarding travel experience for you.

Your Program Director will provide sightseeing trips, handle all travel details, reserve optional tours you choose to take, oversee your Discovery Series events, and provide any other assistance you may need. You will be in the company of a Program Director throughout your vacation.

### Mexican Culture

There is no one true "Mexican" culture. Instead, Mexico's culture reflects a blend of indigenous and Spanish customs and traditions that vary greatly across the country. Many things we think of as distinctively "Mexican"—from embroidered sombreros to mariachi music—are representative of a specific region of the country. Indigenous groups within Mexico include the Nahuas, Otomis, Mayas, Zapotecs, Tzeltals, and Tzotziles, who each contribute to Mexico's culture while preserving their own unique cultural identity in terms of cuisine, customs, rituals, and language.

Spanish is the primary language spoken almost everywhere in Mexico, and about 6% of the population also speak indigenous languages like Mayan, Nahuatl—and 66 more. Several English words such as chocolate, coyote, tomato, and avocado are actually of Nahuatl origin. Religion and family also figure prominently in Mexican culture, with more than 80% Mexicans identifying themselves as Catholic. Although many people in Mexico have also incorporated elements of pre-Hispanic Mayan beliefs as part of their faith. Family has been central to Mexican culture since pre-Columbian times. One unique and important event in Mexican family life is the *quinceañera*, a celebration that signifies a girl's journey from childhood to womanhood on her 15th birthday.

A major Mexican holiday is the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe, a celebration of the appearance of the Virgin Mary to a Mexican peasant in early years of Spanish rule. Another notable Mexican celebration is The Day of the Dead (*Día de los Muertos*), a colorful two-day festival similar to Christianity's All Saints Day and All Souls Day, but blending in pagan beliefs with song, prayer, food, and flowers as families gather in cemeteries to celebrate loved ones who have passed away.

Mexican culture is also known for its rich artistic heritage, including millennia-old traditions of silver-smithing, mosaics, textiles, pottery, and basket-weaving. And no visit is complete without an evening serenaded by the sounds of a Mariachi band, whose musical stylings and

dress originated in the southern state of Jalisco during the 19th century and is even recognized by UNESCO for its “Intangible Cultural Heritage.” You may enjoy a mariachi performance even more with a shot or two of tequila. The agave flavored spirit has been produced here for more than 900 years—and it is actually illegal to be made outside the Mexican state of Jalisco.

## Mexican Cuisine

Dispel any associations you may have with Mexican food that you tried north of the border. The authentic cuisine of Mexico is very different than the version we enjoy here at home, which more often than not is based on Tex-Mex recipes. True Mexican cuisine is ancient and complex, with many regional variants. It is considered to be one of the world’s great cuisines, and was designated as part of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity by UNESCO.

About those regional variants—Mexicans take their food seriously, so the cooking styles of neighboring states are appreciated by all and often available in major cities, most notably Mexico City, the culinary (as well as political and cultural) capital. Here you’ll find the best of Mexico in high-end gourmet temples as well as in the street stalls that blanket the city. As for traditional Mexican fare, here are some dishes not to be missed:

- Another national favorite is **mole** from state of Oaxaca. There are seven traditional styles of this rich and complex sauce, which can contain up to 30 different ingredients. The most popular are (red) **mole poblano** (often served with chicken) and black **mole negro**, which gets its color from chocolate but is savory, not sweet.
- There are hundreds of different types of **tacos** in Mexico and none resemble the fast-food version you get in the States. A Mexican taco will not have cheese (if it does, it’s a **quesadilla**). Instead, your soft corn tortilla will be filled with anything from **carne asada** (grilled meat) to seafood or spicy **chorizo** (sausage.) It will be garnished with chopped onions or cilantro and an array of salsas.
- The most popular style is tacos al pastor which are filled with seasoned grilled pork. The classic version served at the Mexico City restaurant called El Huequito comes with a yellow mole sauce and pineapple. Another must-try street food is **elote**, grilled corn on the cob doused with chili powder, lime, butter, cilantro and a sauce of **cotija** cheese and mayo. It comes on a stick, or in a cup (for easy eating on the go.)
- **Aguachile** is a marinated shrimp dish that is similar to ceviche but spicier. It means ““hile water” since the marinade includes lime juice, chiles and salt. The acidity “cooks” the shrimp, which often come with a side of cucumbers, onions, and avocados to counter the heat. You will find this dish in cities like Campeche and Merida.
- Try also **cochinita pibil**, a Yucatan-style, pulled pork shoulder that’s slowly braised in achiote paste, orange juice, and lime.
- When Mexicans crave comfort food, it’s often **pozole** that they long for. This ancient, pre-Hispanic dish is a deeply flavorful soup made with large kernels of hominy corn, herbs, and chicken or shredded pork. After simmering for many hours, it’s sprinkled with lettuce, radish, onion, lime, and chiles.

- Your sweet tooth will be satisfied if you start your day with **churros**, deep-fried dough sticks dusted with sugar and cinnamon, and dunked in hot chocolate or coffee.
- Try a slice of **flan**, a caramel-y confection made with evaporated milk, condensed milk, and cream.
- **Chiles en nogada** are the national dish. They're popular on Mexican Independence Day (September 16) because they contain the three colors of the Mexican flag. These are green poblano chiles stuffed with ground meat (usually turkey, beef, or pork), then draped with a creamy white walnut sauce and sprinkled with red pomegranate seeds. This dish is only available in July and September.

## Mexico City in Brief

### City Layout & Details

As the capital of Mexico, Mexico City is divided into 16 boroughs and approximately 340 neighborhoods. The historical center, known as the Centro or Centro Histórico, is laid out in a grid-like pattern and is centered around the Zócalo, the main plaza where many festivals and large events take place. As the heart and cultural epicenter of the city, you'll find many museums, churches, and art pieces, including the Museo del Templo Mayor, the Palacia Nacional, and the Palacio de Bellas Artes.

### Local Transportation

**Metro (Subway):** The Metro spans the city and greater area with 12 subway lines operating between 5am-midnight on weekdays, 6am-midnight on Saturdays, and 7am-midnight on Sundays. You can buy individual tickets (*boletos*) at the ticket windows (*taquilla*) or you may purchase a rechargeable card for 10 Mexican pesos to load with credit for rides. Each ride costs 5 pesos (approximately 25 cents in USD).

**Metrobús:** The metrobús offers 7 routes that stop at stations across the city. You must pay at the entrance to the platform using a rechargeable card (available to purchase for 10 pesos) that can be loaded with money for rides. Each ride costs 6 pesos. The rechargeable card can also be used for the subway.

**Trolebús:** You may see orange colored buses, also called "RTP" which pick up at designated bus stops along some of the major roads throughout the city. These buses generally run until 11:30pm and cost 2 pesos for a regular bus or 4 pesos for an express bus.

There are many other privately-run local options, such as smaller minibuses known as *peseros*. These buses follow fixed routes and have information displayed in the windshield. Prices vary depending on the distance traveled.

*Note: Special accommodations are made for women and children on both the subway and the metrobús. On the subway, some cars at the front may be reserved for women and children during peak hours (approximately 7:30am–10am and 3pm–8pm). If so, you’ll see a gate labeled as, “Sólo Mujeres y Niños.” On the metrobús, the front of the bus is typically marked with pink seating to denote that it is dedicated for women and children.*

**Taxis:** There are several different types of taxi services in Mexico City. You’ll see pink and white metered street cabs which start at about 9 pesos. However, we strongly suggest that you avoid taking this type of cab due to safety issues. A better alternative is a radio taxi which can be requested by calling a dispatcher (or you may ask your hotel to call on your behalf). While radio taxis are about 2–3 times more expensive than a street taxi, they are a much safer alternative. Another good option is to use an app-based car service, such as Uber, which allows you to request a ride through the app and provides the driver and vehicle information, as well as a log with the details of your trip.

## Oaxaca in Brief

### Pronunciation

The city’s name is usually pronounced as “wah–HA–ka”.

### City Layout & Details

The historical city center is laid out in a grid pattern, with Alcala/Bustamante as the main north–south axis and Avenue de Independencia as the main east–west axis. Near where the two intersect is the Plaza de la Constitucion—known locally as the Zocalo—a large square with a delicate art nouveau pavilion flanked by churches. This is the unofficial center point of the historical district. Kitty-corner from the Zocalo is a second square, the Alameda, which has the city’s cathedral (Catedral de Nuestra Senora de la Asuncion). A few blocks north is the Plaza de Santo Domingo, which can be reached by one of two pedestrian streets: Alcala or Cinco de Mayo. One block south of the Zocalo are two large markets, the Mercado Benito Juarez (handicrafts, flowers, tools, etc.) and the Mercado 20 de Noviembre (food).

**TIP:** *When a street crosses Avenue de Independencia, its name usually changes. To better clarify addresses, many local will include the nearest street corner or cross street (i.e. 123 Main Street, by the corner of Main and Garden).*

### Local Transportation

The historic center of Oaxaca is best explored on foot. But should you wish to travel a longer distance, you’ll have a couple options: local buses or taxis. Because taxis are relatively inexpensive compared to the U.S., most travelers prefer them to the local bus. However, the average city taxi is not metered—you negotiate a flat price with the driver instead—so make sure you agree on a price before you depart. Taxis may impose additional fees for baggage or for trips between 10 pm and 5 am. City taxis are usually yellow or all white.

To get outside the city, you could try a colectivo which is a shared taxi for up to 6 travelers that works somewhat like a bus—you find one going your direction, flag it down, and pay your fare to the driver, who lets you off at the closest stop to your destination. Colectivos are maroon and white.

## Cuisine

The cuisine of Oaxaca mixes pre-Colombian ingredients with Spanish and Italian influences to create a surprising and rich food culture. Some of the most interesting—and unexpected—local dishes are:

- **Moles** – Mole (mole-lay) is a complex sauce that can include anywhere from 15 to 30 ingredients. Although Oaxaca is known as the “land of 7 moles”, the most famous is black mole, which usually gets its color from the use of chocolate as a savory spice and not a sweet.
- **Barbacoa** – Mexican BBQ, usually goat or lamb, served in a corn tortilla
- **Champurrado** – Hot chocolate with spices like vanilla, cinnamon, and anise
- **Chapulines** – Roasted grasshoppers; eaten as a snack
- **Garnachas** – Bite-size corn tortillas, deep fried, and topped with whatever’s at hand
- **Tasajo** – Meat that has been air-dried, smoked, or sun-dried—far better than jerky.
- **Mezcal** – An alcoholic drink made from the maguey plant (a type of agave). Related to tequila, but smokier-tasting.
- **Oaxacan string cheese** – Similar to mozzarella but rolled into long ribbons
- **Tamales** – Packages of meat, veggies, and a starch (usually rice or corn dough) cooked in banana leaf or corn husk.
- **Tlayudas** – The so-called “Oaxacan pizza” has a dried tortilla base, with heaps of toppings such as refried beans, tomatoes, avocados, and meat.

## San Miguel de Allende in Brief

### City Layout

The heart of this beautiful colonial city is arranged in a grid-like pattern with two main streets, San Francisco and Calle de Correo, running horizontally to the north of the city center. Constitution Square lies between San Francisco and Calle de Correo and this is where you’ll find the famous 17th-century Parroquia de San Miguel Arcangel. The Benito Juarez Park lies to the south of the city center. You’ll find a variety of restaurants, shops, and beautiful architecture throughout the city center. Look for handicrafts at the local market, which is located to the north east of the city center, past San Francisco street.



# Merida in Brief

## City Layout & Details

Merida's downtown is mostly on a grid plan, but with a few streets that veer off diagonally. Streets are usually numbered not named (for example Calle 61 or Calle 8). Odd numbers run east-west while even numbers run north-south. Numbers begin at the north and east sides of town. The main thoroughfare is Calle 60, which runs past the cathedral, shops, restaurants, theaters, and the main square (Plaza Grande).

In addition to close proximity to the main street, Plaza Grande also houses the Palacio Municipal (municipal buildings), Museo Casa Montejo (a notable historical building), and the Museo Fernando García Ponce-Macay (a museum of modern and contemporary art).

Just to the north of the historical town center is the fashionable Paseo de Montejo neighborhood, which spreads out from the boulevard by the same name. (The street isn't numbered because it was inserted between Calle 58 and Calle 56 later on.) Here you'll find more restaurants and shops, plus the stately mansions from the turn of the century.

## Local Transportation

Taxis are relatively inexpensive—usually less than \$5 to go across town—but not needed within the walkable downtown area.

There are also city buses, but they can be a bit confusing for the visitor, especially if you don't speak Spanish. However, they can be useful if you want to travel between downtown and the Paseo de Montejo neighborhood. Look for the Itzimna bus, which you can catch on Calle 59 (the stop is between Calles 56 and 58), and will drop you off on the Paseo de Montejo boulevard itself.

## Cuisine

In Merida, a tropical climate and a rich Mayan history add up to a unique style of food, with some very special ingredients:

- **Chaya maya:** A type of green, similar to spinach, which is used in many regional dishes.
- **Pibil:** A cooking style that uses spice rub and a low-and-slow cooking method to create tender and flavorful meat.
- **Seville oranges:** Brought over by the Spanish, the juice from the oranges is often used in place of vinegar to give a dish some tang or acidity.
- **Habanero peppers:** Brings the heat.
- **Achiote:** A slightly bitter red seed that is crushed into a powder and used as the base for spice mixtures.

## Shopping: What to Buy, Customs, Shipping & More

There may be scheduled visits to local shops during your vacation. There is no requirement to make a purchase during these stops, and any purchase made is a direct transaction with the shop in question, subject to the vendor's terms of purchase. Grand Circle is not responsible for purchases you make on your trip or for the shipment of your purchases.

### Returns

If you discover an issue with an item, you should contact the vendor directly. If the shop is outside the country, you should expect that any resolution will take longer than it would in the U.S. We recommend that you keep a copy of all your receipts, invoices, or contracts, along with the shop's contact information. Keep in mind, local practice may vary from the standards you are used to, so don't assume that you have a certain number of days after the purchase to speak up or that you are guaranteed a refund.

### Crafts & Souvenirs

#### Mexico

You'll find many bargains in Mexico: hand-loomed wool rugs and blankets; original ceramics and pottery; tin, copper, and papier-mâché sculpture; leather goods—including huarache sandals; iron wood carvings, jewelry made from silver, onyx, abalone, amethyst, and semi-precious stones; liqueurs; lacquerware; serapes (capes) and rebozos (shawls) of translucent silk; and guayabera shirts, Panama hats, and resort wear.

### U.S. Customs Regulations & Shipping Charges

For all things related to U.S. Customs, the ultimate authority is the U.S. Bureau of Customs & Border Protection. Their website, [www.cbp.gov](http://www.cbp.gov) has the answers to the most frequently asked questions. Or you can call them at **1-877-227-5511**.

The top three points to know are:

- At time of writing, your personal duty-free allowance is \$800 for items brought with you. Items totaling more than \$800 are subject to duty fees.
- **Items shipped home are always subject to duty when received in the U.S.** Even when the shop has offered to include shipping and duties in the price, this typically means shipping to the nearest customs facility and payment of the export duties—not door-to-door shipping or payment of the import duties. All additional duties or shipping charges would be your responsibility. Unless an item is small enough to send by parcel service (like FedEx), chances are you will need to arrange shipping or pick-up once the item is in the U.S. and will need to pay customs duties.
- It is illegal to import products made from endangered animal species. U.S. Customs & Border Protection will seize these items, as well as most furs, coral, tortoise shell, reptile skins, feathers, plants, and items made from animal skins.

## DEMOGRAPHICS & HISTORY

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### Mexico

#### Facts, Figures & National Holidays

- **Area:** 758,449 square miles
- **Capital:** Mexico City
- **Government type:** Federal republic
- **Location:** Mexico is located in North America, directly to the south of the Continental United States.
- **Geography:** Broadly speaking, the country can be broken up into five zones: deserts to the north, rain forests to the south and east, coastal beaches along the Pacific Ocean and Caribbean Sea, and mountains in the center. A large part of the country is mountainous, and there are two notable chains—the Sierra Madre Oriental and the Sierra Madre Occidental—plus smaller ranges in the Central Plateau. The country also has two notable peninsulas: the Yucatan, which juts out into the Gulf of Mexico, and the Baja, which separates the Pacific Ocean from the Gulf of California.
- **Languages:** Spanish is the official language. Indigenous languages such as Mayan, Nahuatl, and other regional languages are also spoken.
- **Population:** 121,736,809
- **Religions:** Roman Catholic 82.7%, Pentecostal 1.6%, Jehovah's Witnesses 1.4%, other Evangelical Churches 5%, other 1.9%, none 4.7%, unspecified 2.7%
- **Time Zone:** Mexico has four time zones that generally correspond with the four time zones in the Continental U.S. However, Mexico's daylight saving time starts and ends on different dates than in the U.S., so there will be brief periods when the time zones aren't identical in the two countries.

## National Holidays: Mexico

In addition to the holidays listed below, Mexico celebrates a number of national holidays that follow a lunar calendar, such as Easter. To find out if you will be traveling during these holidays, please visit **www.timeanddate.com/holidays**.

01/01 New Year's Day

01/11 Day of the Dead

03/08 International Women's Day

05/01 Labor Day/May Day

09/16 Independence Day

12/12 Day of the Virgin of Guadalupe

12/25 Christmas Day

## Mexico: A Brief History

Hunter-gatherers inhabited Mexico more than 28,000 years ago. Between 1800 and 300 BCE, complex cultures began to form, maturing into advanced Mesoamerican civilizations such as the Olmec, Teotihuacan, Maya, Zapotec, Mixtec, Huastec, Toltec and Mexica (a.k.a. "Aztecs"). They are credited with many advances: Pyramid building, mathematics, astronomy, medicine, writing, highly-accurate calendars, fine arts, intensive agriculture, engineering, an abacus calculation, a complex theology, and more. They flourished for 4,000 years until the arrival of Europeans.

In 1519, Mexico was invaded by the Spanish conquistador Hernán Cortés with 600 soldiers. His expedition was unauthorized, but he was forgiven his mutiny when he conquered the Aztec capital of Tenochtitlan (Mexico City) in 1521. It would take another two centuries before Spain's conquest of Mexico would be complete, as various native peoples continued to rebel. Many indigenous people were murdered or enslaved, with thousands succumbing to diseases brought by the foreigners. By 1600, the population dropped from about eight million to two million.

During the colonial era (1521–1810), Mexico was known as "New Spain" and its territories included the Spanish Caribbean, Central America as far south as Costa Rica, the southwestern United States, and the Philippines. After Napoleon invaded Spain and put his brother on the Spanish throne, Mexican conservatives, clergy, and rich landowners (who supported Spain's Bourbon royal family) objected to Napoleon's more liberal policies. This established a rift that continued to drive politics over the next century: Liberales favored a democratic Mexico; and Conservadores wanted to restore the Bourbon monarchy and colonial status quo.

In 1810, Miguel Hidalgo, a progressive Catholic priest, declared Mexico's independence, which was officially won in 1821. Many presidents, emperors, and dictators came and went as the disputes between Liberales and Conservadores continued. In 1861, the reformer Benito Juárez became president, but soon thereafter, France invaded and established the Hapsburg Archduke Ferdinand Maximilian of Austria as Emperor of Mexico, with Conservadores support. The French army was defeated in Puebla on May 5, 1862, celebrated as Cinco de Mayo ever since. But the war was not over. Juárez recaptured Mexico City in 1867, and the Emperor was executed.

Juarez was succeeded by the dictator Porfirio Diaz, whose brutal regime kept the nation in abject poverty and suppressed civil rights from 1876 to 1911. By 1910, the people had had enough and the Mexican Revolution began. Sadly, the various factions (with leaders such as the populist Pancho Villa and the radical Emiliano Zapata) became embroiled in a constant series of shifting allegiances. The war lasted ten years, shattered the economy, and left 2 million dead.

The onetime reformers became the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI), which held power from 1920 to 2000, controlling all aspects of Mexican life. They initially enacted beneficial reforms such as agrarian land redistribution, over time they grew more conservative, corrupt, and repressive. Mexico's middle class grew, but very slowly. The increasing power of the drug cartels was linked to government corruption. The PRI's 70-year grip ended in 2000 when Vicente Fox and his Partido Acción Nacional brought Mexico's first-ever peaceful change of regime.

In 2018, the center-left Andrés Manuel López Obrador became president. His agenda includes universal health care, free internet, popular referendum on key issues, anti corruption and anti-cartel programs, as well as a national mid-term "vote of confidence" on his own administration.



## RESOURCES

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### Suggested Reading

#### Mexico

***Manana Forever? Mexico and the Mexicans*** by Jorge G. Castaneda (2012, Essays) Mexico's former Foreign Minister offers frank appraisals on a variety of issues including Mexican customs, urban planning in Mexico City, the nation's soccer-mania, its complicated relationship with the U.S., and what the future holds.

***The Devil's Highway*** by Luis Alberto Urea (2004, History/Journalism) The true story of what happened when a group of men tried to cross the border from Mexico to Arizona on the "Devil's Highway". Finalist for the 2005 Pulitzer Prize.

***A Perfect Red: Empire, Espionage, and the Quest for the Color of Desire*** by Amy Butler Greenfield (2006, History) The history of cochineal—a mysterious red dye from Mexico—that was prized by the Aztecs, European conquerors, and great artists alike.

***The Lacuna*** by Barbara Kingsolver (2009, Fiction) A novel about a man split between the country of his birth (America) and the country where he grew up (Mexico), as told through his journal.

***Aztec*** by Gary Jennings (1980, Historical Fiction) At more than a thousand pages, this sweeping epic is just the first of a trilogy (with more by other writers after the author's death) about the Aztec civilization. Impeccably researched, it relates the Aztec civilization's colossal rise and fall through the eyes of Mixtli-Dark Cloud, one of the most memorable characters in modern fiction.

### Suggested Films & Videos

#### Mexico

***Roma*** (2018, Drama) Director Alfonso Cuarón's semi-autobiographical masterpiece about growing up in the Roma district of Mexico City. As his parent's marriage dissolves, young Paco's upper middle-class family come to rely more and more on the stability of Cleo, their Mixtec maid. But Cleo has troubles of her own, having just found out that she is pregnant. This film was nominated for ten Oscars, and won three.

***Frida*** (2002, Drama) Directed by Julie Taymor (*The Lion King*) and starring Salma Hayek (who also co-produced), his biopic not only reveals the complicated and controversial life of famed artist and feminist icon Frida Kahlo, it depicts the political and cultural life of Mexico in the first half of the 20th century.

***Coco*** (2014, Animated) This animated Disney-Pixar collaboration tells the story of 12 year-old Miguel, who is accidentally transported to the Land of the Dead, where his musician grandfather helps him return to his family and the living world. The film (which won two Oscars) was meticulously researched and is a celebration of Mexican culture, music, and traditions.

**Traffic** (2000, Crime Drama/Thriller) Four different plotlines share one key element—drugs—in this movie that explores the flow of illegal drugs from Mexico into the U.S. from multiple angles. Because of the subject matter, some scenes can be distressing, but the movie did win widespread critical acclaim.

**Y Tu Mamá También** (2001, Comedy/Drama) The first critical and commercial success by superstar film director Alfonso Cuarón (*Harry Potter*, *Gravity*, *Children of Men*), this smart and sexy film touches on class hypocrisy in Mexico as we follow a pair of teenaged boy on a cross-country escapade with a beautiful older woman. Spanish with English subtitles.

## Useful Websites

**Grand Circle Forum** (tips from previous travelers)  
[www.gct.com/forum](http://www.gct.com/forum)

**Grand Circle Frequently Asked Questions**  
[www.gct.com/faq](http://www.gct.com/faq)

**International Health Information/CDC (Centers for Disease Control)**  
[www.cdc.gov/travel](http://www.cdc.gov/travel)

**Electricity & Plugs**  
[www.worldstandards.eu/electricity/plugs-and-sockets](http://www.worldstandards.eu/electricity/plugs-and-sockets)

**Foreign Exchange Rates**  
[www.xe.com/currencyconverter](http://www.xe.com/currencyconverter)  
[www.oanda.com/converter/classic](http://www.oanda.com/converter/classic)

**ATM Locators**  
[www.mastercard.com/atm](http://www.mastercard.com/atm)  
[www.visa.com/atmlocator](http://www.visa.com/atmlocator)

**World Weather**  
[www.intellicast.com](http://www.intellicast.com)  
[www.weather.com](http://www.weather.com)  
[www.wunderground.com](http://www.wunderground.com)

**Basic Travel Phrases** (80 languages)  
[www.travlang.com/languages](http://www.travlang.com/languages)

**Packing Tips**  
[www.travelite.org](http://www.travelite.org)

**U.S. Customs & Border Protection**  
[www.cbp.gov/travel](http://www.cbp.gov/travel)

**Transportation Security Administration (TSA)**  
[www.tsa.gov](http://www.tsa.gov)

**National Passport Information Center**  
[www.travel.state.gov](http://www.travel.state.gov)

**Holidays Worldwide**  
[www.timeanddate.com/holidays](http://www.timeanddate.com/holidays)

## Useful Apps

### **Flight Stats**

Track departures, arrivals, and flight status

### **LoungeBuddy**

Get access to premium airport lounges around the world

### **Timeshifter**

Personalized tips for avoiding jetlag, based on neuroscience and your own data

### **GoogleMaps**

Maps and directions anywhere in the world

### **Triposo**

City guides, walking maps, and more – and it works offline

### **Rome2rio**

Where to go, what to see, and what to do in more than 160 countries

### **Flush or Sit or Squat**

Find a clean toilet anywhere

### **Uber**

Ride sharing around the world

### **Visa Plus and Mastercard Cirrus**

#### **ATM locations**

Shows the location of the nearest ATM in your network

### **TunnelBear**

Provides a secure VPN (virtual private network) that will encrypt your browsing data when you use a public WiFi network

### **What's App, Skype, or Signal**

WiFi calling anywhere in the world

### **Duolingo, FLuentU, or Babbel**

Learn dozens of foreign languages

### **Google Translate**

Fast and simple translations

### **XE**

Currency conversions

### **SizeGuide**

Clothing and shoe sizes in all countries

### **Best Units Converter**

Converts currency, mileage, weights, and many other units of measurement

### **Happy Cow**

Locate vegan and vegetarian eateries in 195 countries

### **Eatwith**

Dine with locals all over the world

### **Meetup**

Connects you with locals who share your interests

### **Skyview**

Identifies constellations and heavenly bodies

### **Travello**

Find travel friends on the road

### **TripWhistle**

Maps your location and provides emergency numbers for police, medics, and more

### **GeoSure**

Safely navigate neighborhoods around the world

### **Tourlina**

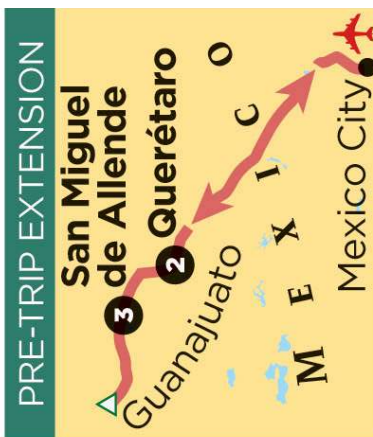
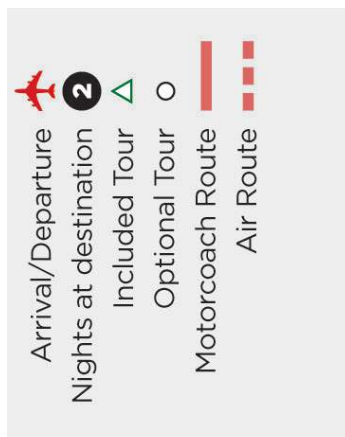
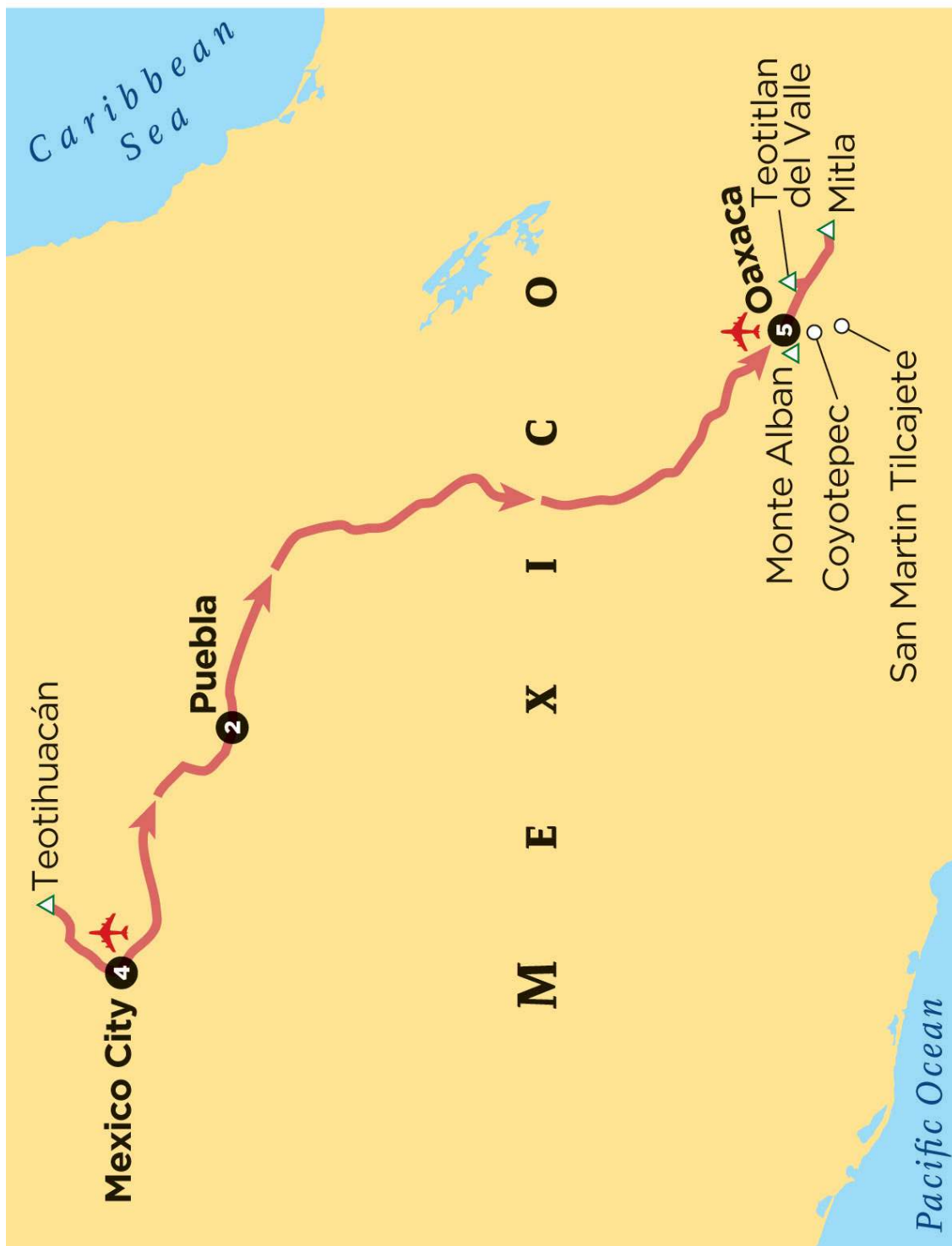
For women only, it connects you with other female travelers

### **ALIX for One**

Created by and for women, it identifies solo-friendly dining spots in major international cities

### **Chirpey**

For women only, connect with other women, find out what's safe, meet up, and more





# SHARE YOUR TRAVEL EXPERIENCES

We invite you to share your videos, slideshows, and photos of your past Grand Circle vacations to help inspire your fellow travelers. Go to [www.gct.com/myplanner](http://www.gct.com/myplanner) to upload your photos or video of at least 7 minutes in length and they may be featured on our website.

## Most Popular Videos, Slideshows & Photos from our Grand Circle Vacations Created by our Travelers



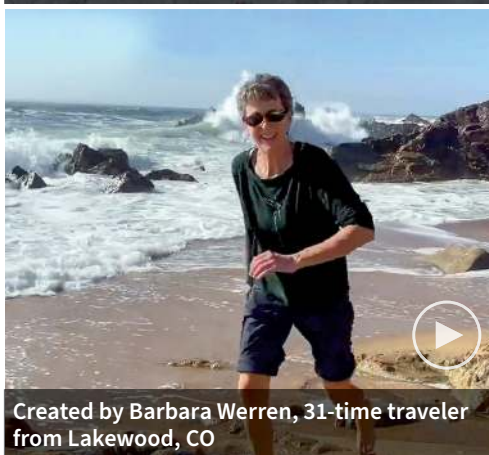
Submitted by Paul Motyka, 11-time traveler from Acton, MA



Submitted by Kay Gevedon, 3-time traveler from Mt. Sterling, KY



Submitted by David Woods, first-time traveler from Rockport, TX



Created by Barbara Werren, 31-time traveler from Lakewood, CO



Created by Sharon Fleury, 8-time traveler from Poughkeepsie, NY



Created by Susan Karski, 5-time traveler from Wimauma, FL



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