

Guatemala to Mexico

13 days | Antigua to Playa del Carmen



From the highlands of Antigua to the white sand beaches of Playa del Carmen, explore the delights of Guatemala, Belize and Mexico on this 13 day adventure. Discover charming colonial towns and beautiful landscapes, explore magnificent Mayan ruins in the heart of the jungle and relax on the idyllic island of Caye Caulker before travelling to Mexico's Mayan Riviera.

HIGHLIGHTS AND INCLUSIONS

Trip Highlights

- Tulum - visit the beautiful cliffside Mayan city of Tulum and explore the ruins
- Antigua - explore Guatemala's most enchanting city which sits in the shadow of three large volcanoes
- Rio Dulce - take a tranquil boat ride along this beautiful river through the towns of Rio Dulce and El Rellenos
- Flores - wander around this charming island town on Lake Peten or choose from a range of optional activities
- Tikal - explore this remarkable Mayan archaeological site, deep in the heart of the rainforest

- San Ignacio - choose from a range of optional activities in Belize's adventure capital, including caving, hiking, kayaking and horseback riding
- Caye Caulker - soak up the sunshine and relax on this idyllic island
- Laguna Bakalar - relax by this spectacular lake of seven colours
- Playa del Carmen - relax on beautiful palm fringed beaches in this popular coastal resort town

What's Included

- 12 breakfasts
- 12 nights 3 star hotels
- Airport arrival transfer from La Aurora International Airport in Guatemala City on day 1
- Transfers and transportation in private air conditioned vehicles
- Water taxi from Belize City - Caye Caulker - Chetumal
- Tikal and Tulum guided sightseeing and entrance fees
- Escorted by an English speaking local leader with specialist guides at certain sites of interest
- Rio Dulce boat transfer to lodge

What's Not Included

- International flights and visa
- Tipping - an entirely personal gesture

- Airport departure transfer - can be booked at an additional cost upon request

DETAILED ITINERARY

Days 1-2 : Antigua



Welcome to Guatemala! You will be met upon arrival into La Aurora International Airport in Guatemala City and transferred to your hotel in Antigua. The rest of day 1 and day 2 is free to explore this picturesque colonial city which cannot fail to enchant with its cobbled streets, parks and plazas, ornate churches and colourful street markets, all set against a spectacular backdrop of awe inspiring volcanoes. Here, the local indigenous people dressed in their colourful costumes can be found selling their crafts and textiles and as the cultural centre of Guatemala, Antigua is an ideal place to experience the traditional music, architecture and art of the country.

Overnight - Antigua (B:1)

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Guatemala to Mexico

Days 3-4 : Rio Dulce



Antigua - Rio Dulce. We enjoy scenic views of a tropical river as we travel from Antigua to the town of Rio Dulce on day 12. Rio Dulce ("Sweet River") is located in the northeast region of Izabal and it's part of the much larger Izabal lake. A bridge connects Rio Dulce with a town called El Rellenos. We take a short, scenic boat ride to our lodge, where we spend the next two nights in cabins on the water.

The next day is free to participate in optional activities! We recommend visiting the impressive citadel Castillo San Felipe, the ancient Mayan Ruins of Quirigua, the beautiful Finca Paraiso Hotspring- Waterfall and the Rio Dulce National Park. Just ask your tour leader for more information on what to do in the area.

Overnight - Rio Dulce (B:2)

Day 5 : Flores

Rio Dulce - Flores. Today we're off to Flores, a beautiful island-town which is located in the centre of Lake Peten Itza. The afternoon is free to participate in optional activities like a visit to the Las Guacamayas Biological Station, the Mayan Ruins of Uaxactun, Ixpanpajul Nature Park, a round trip to Tzimin Chac to see the sunset, or just relax with a walk around the enchanting town. **Overnight - Flores (B)**

Day 6 : Tikal Ruins

Flores - San Ignacio (Belize). This morning look forward to a guided tour of the breathtaking Tikal Ruins. Nestled deep in the jungle, this complex is one of the largest Maya sites discovered. It was excavated in 1956 and 1969 and much of the site is yet to be unearthed. Tikal was once the capital of a conquest state and one of the most powerful kingdoms of the ancient Maya. The temples, residences and religious monuments decorated in hieroglyphic inscriptions provide

a long list of ruling dynasties with many tombs of the once-ruling kings.

This afternoon we bid farewell to Guatemala and cross the border into beautiful Belize, where we spend the next two nights in San Ignacio. Nestled between Guatemala, Mexico, and the Caribbean Sea, Belize is a constitutional monarchy that was originally called British Honduras. Blessed with beautiful beaches and lush rainforests as well as a thrilling colonial history and significant cultural diversity, Belize is sure to captivate you. **Overnight - San Ignacio (B)**

Day 7 : San Ignacio

San Ignacio, or Cayo as it's called by the locals, is the adventure capital of Belize. There is nothing planned for today so you can partake in some of the many optional activities available here. San Ignacio is very close to Belize's famous Mayan ruins and offers plenty of exciting outdoor activities including caving, hiking, kayaking, horseback riding, and more!

Overnight - San Ignacio (B)

Days 8-9 : Caye Caulker



San Ignacio - Caye Caulker. On day 8 we travel to Belize's capital where we take a water taxi to the small island of Caye Caulker. Belize is renowned for its laid back and relaxed pace of life and on the beautiful island of Caye Caulker, where their motto is "go Slow", we kick off our shoes and enjoy some R&R.

Make the most of the following day on the island, there are many things to do. You could visit one of the other Cayes or take a snorkelling trip to the stunning corals where you can see tropical fish, nurse sharks and manta rays to name a few. Another recommended excursion is to the Hol Chan Marine Reserve where you

will find the incredible world famous Blue Hole and the world's second longest barrier reef. Caye Caulker is excellent for manatee spotting, a popular activity seeing these passive creatures. If exploring is not your thing you can just relax by the beautiful turquoise waters. Snorkel tours and dive boats leave daily for full or half day tours to the reef. There are also plenty of places to shop and to try the local food. **Overnight - Caye Caulker (B:2)**

Day 10 : Laguna Bacalar

Caye Caulker - Laguna Bacalar. After breakfast we take a scenic boat ride to the Mexican Chetumal before continuing by bus to the beautiful Laguna Bacalar, the second largest lake in Mexico. The rest of the afternoon is yours to relax and explore the 7 cenotes that feed into the lake. We spend the night in thatched cabins at an eco lodge, located on the shores of the lake.

Please note: The cabins at the eco lodge have 100% solar powered electricity, which is very limited. Cabins have a small ventilator and electronic devices need to be charged at the reception. **Overnight - Laguna Bacalar (B)**

Days 11-12 : Playa del Carmen



Laguna Bacalar - Tulum - Playa del Carmen. After breakfast on day 11 we make our way to Playa del Carmen stopping off at the beautiful Cliffside Mayan city of Tulum where we have a chance to visit the famous ruins and immerse ourselves in the archaeological and colonial importance this city has to offer. We then continue our journey to Playa del Carmen, where you can spend some time at the beach or exploring the local area.

The next day is free to enjoy the white sand beach of Playa del Carmen, take a day tour, or just go shopping on 5th avenue. Enjoy your last full day, soaking up the vibrant Mexican

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Guatemala to Mexico

atmosphere! **Overnight - Playa del Carmen** (B:2)

Day 13 : Playa del Carmen

Our tour comes to an end today and it's time to return home. Arrangements end after breakfast and hotel check out.

We can book a transfer to Cancun Airport upon request or some extra nights if you still do not want to leave!(B)

Our Partners

This tour is operated in conjunction with our trusted partner and you will join travellers who booked through different operators, not solely On The Go.

The Tour Group

Our partner also offers this tour to their travellers in another language and with different accommodation for the overnight stays en route. At times, when there are less than 6 English speaking travellers in a group, the tour may be combined and you will be joined by a second tour leader and travellers who may speak English as a second language. On such occasions you will still be escorted by an English speaking tour leader, while the additional tour leader will conduct their travellers' guided sightseeing in another language.

The group can vary in size from 2 – 18 persons. This is the second half of our longer 22 day Mayan Trail tour and therefore you may join travellers who started their tour earlier in Playa del Carmen.

Arriving into Guatemala

An airport arrival transfer is included on day 1 of your tour from La Aurora International Airport which is approximately one hour away. At the airport terminal please look out for a driver holding a sign with your name on it.

Important: If you are going to be delayed, you must advise us as soon as possible to try and rearrange your transfer (a supplement may apply). If we are not made aware of any delays our driver will only wait for one hour after the scheduled time and after this, you will have to arrange your own transport to the hotel at

your own expense. Please contact us on the emergency phone number on your voucher.

We recommend that you obtain Guatemalan Quetzals once you arrive in the airport. There are lots of ATMs available and exchange bureaus and whilst you may not get as good of an exchange rate than if you were to exchange in the city it is good to have some cash on you.

Day 1 of the tour is a joining day for you to have the flexibility to arrive at any time. A welcome meeting will be held on day 2 in the hotel lobby at 08.30.

Should you wish to spend more time in the start/end cities of the tour we can happily organise pre and post tour accommodation upon request.

Check in time at hotels can vary but is usually from 1300 on day 1. If you wish to use the services of the room beforehand then it is recommended to advise the hotel and request an early check in however this may incur an additional fee and will depend on the hotel facilities if they can accommodate this request. The same applies for any clients wishing to arrange late check out on the last day however this may incur an additional nights cost.

Accommodation

The accommodation on this tour depends on the location but generally we work with 3 star standard hotels and above (except in Panajachel and Antigua where we stay in traditional pousada accommodation). Our hotels are usually situated close to the main sights and town centres. Staff are friendly and there is often a bar and restaurant either on site or nearby.

All accommodation is included from the arrival day until check out time on the final day of the tour however there is an option to extend your stay and book additional post night accommodation.

Clothing & Footwear

We recommend bringing lightweight clothing with you for the duration of your trip. Evenings in certain locations such as Guatemala and

San Jose can be cold, we recommend bringing clothes that you can layer with at least one pair of warm trousers and jumpers. For anyone visiting during rainy season we highly recommend a waterproof jacket. Please avoid any military or camouflage patterned clothing as this may be illegal in some countries and can cause problems.

Comfortable walking shoes with grip and ankle support are essential for our tours, ideally these will be waterproof.

Essential Items

- A lightweight water/windproof jacket with hood
- Easy to pack wide-brimmed hat or cap
- Towel - you will need a towel for most overnight excursions
- Swimwear
- Sandals/flip flops/thongs

Check the climate and altitude at www.worldclimate.com to get an idea of what the weather will be like on your tour so that you can pack accordingly.

KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

Belize Country Guide

Belize - Fact File

- Official Name: Belize
- Capital: Belmopan
- Population: 366,954
- Total Area: 22,956 square kilometres
- Official Language: English, others: Spanish, Mayan, Garifuna (Carib), Creole
- Religions: Roman Catholic 49.6%, Protestant 27%, none 9.4%, other 14%
- Voltage: 110 volts
- Dialling Code: +501
- Time Difference: GMT/UTC -6.
- Airport Departure Tax: US\$36

Belize - Visas

Most nationals do not need a visa to enter Belize, however it is important to check with your nearest embassy or consulate. As a tourist you are usually entitled to 30 days, however depending on the immigration official you can be allocated less days.

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Guatemala to Mexico

On entering you may be asked to fill out an immigration card. A copy of this card should stay in your passport until you exit the country. There is no official fee to enter Belize, but to exit you must pay an official fee of US\$35 plus security screening fee of US\$0.75. Your tour leader will remind you of this on tour

Belize - Climate

Belize has quite a subtropical climate with temperatures ranging from 16 – 32 degrees Celsius. The wet season runs from June to October and the dry season from November to May. In Northern Belize they receive as little as 50 inches of rain a year whereas the far south can receive up to 180 inches of rain a year which helps feed the jungles and ensure all year round growth.

The hurricane season on the Caribbean side of Central America runs from September to November. This usually means high winds and the occasional storm, although sunny days tend to prevail throughout the year. It is highly unlikely that the full force of a hurricane would hit any of the areas we pass through on our tours, however our tour leaders are fully prepared to take any necessary action and would make itinerary changes if required to ensure the safety of clients.

Visit www.worldclimate.com to get an idea of what the weather will be like on your tour.

Belize - Money

The local currency is the Belize Dollar - BZ\$

Belize has a fixed exchange rate of 2:1 with the US dollar, and you may use either currency throughout the country, however you will usually get change in Belize dollars.

Remember that once out of Belize you will generally not be able to use or exchange Belize dollars. Therefore, you must make sure you spend/exchange/ donate any left-over money before leaving the country.

For up-to-date exchange rates with your own currency visit www.xe.com.

ATMs are available across the country, especially in tourist destinations including Belize City, Caye Caulker and San Ignacio. Visa, Plus, MasterCard and Cirrus/Maestro are

accepted in some Belizean ATMs, as long as you have a four-digit pin. Visa cards are the most widely accepted and ATMs will only give you local currency (not US dollars). Please note that you will often be charged two fees – one from your bank for international use and one for the local Belize Bank.

You should also be able to get a cash advance at the bank (usually only possible for Visa and sometimes Mastercard) although some banks will require a copy of your passport.

Cash is still the standard form of payment in Belize however hotels, and some bars and restaurants however there is usually a minimum charge for this. Do not rely on your card as your only source of money. Always have a few back-ups with you.

Belize generally accepts torn or marked US dollars, so if your notes are damaged you may want to off-load them here! You will have serious difficulties changing/using damaged notes in Honduras, Guatemala or Mexico.

Most places should also accept travellers checks as long as you write your passport number on the back. Please ensure these are in US dollars as otherwise it can be more time consuming to exchange.

Belize - Shopping

Bargaining is not common in Belize, as shops usually have set prices on goods.

Belize is not well known for its handicrafts and textiles and selections may be limited and expensive however in Southern Belize you can hand-woven baskets made by the Mayan women, as well as other carvings. For something truly Belizean you can buy the Garifuna drums, however be careful to declare animal-skin drums at customs and check your country's rules on importing exotic goods.

Belize - Tipping

A 10% service charge is added on to the restaurant bill throughout most of Belize. If it is not added on, it is still expected (especially in the more expensive restaurants). There may also be 'taxes' added to your bill, on top of the service charge. Sometimes this is included in the menu price, other times it is added at the end. You are not expected to

tip taxi drivers unless they go out of their way for you although you should tip anyone who helps with your luggage, approx 50-80 cents. Tipping guides at the end of tours/excursions is always appreciated and your tour leader will advise you on this.

Belize - Local Transport

Taxis are recommended for getting around the San Ignacio area (as local buses can be non-existent or unreliable!). You should expect to pay roughly BZ\$5 for each taxi you take locally, and up to BZ\$10 for a longer journey. The taxis in Belize do not run on meters and you should always confirm the price before getting in the car.

Belize - Food & Drink

Belizean cuisine is simple yet hearty and you will eat well. There is some seafood available in Belize – especially lobster and shrimp. Most meals come with some kind of salad. Other common side dishes include coleslaw, potato salad, rice & beans and sweet fried bananas (platanos). You can get very good, cheap set meals for lunch, as this is the main meal of the day. Apart from the delicious local food, there are also many international restaurants to be found in Belize. Italian, Chinese, Indian and Sri Lankan restaurants are abundant. Your tour leader will be able to recommend restaurants.

Food

Breakfast usually consists of eggs with beans and johnny cakes (biscuit like rolls) or fry-jacks (deep fried dough puffs). To eat them Mayan style, order your eggs scrambled with diced tomatoes.

White rice and red beans power most of the country and over the years different variations to the dish have been created. Your rice and beans may be cooked with coconut and mild spices and served with grilled meat or fish, or your beans may be cooked in a stew and accompanied with boiled rice.

There is much more on offer than rice and beans in Belize. Chicken is the preferred meat and often found in tasty burritos and stews, but seafood is the country's speciality.

Lobster or Shrimp - grilled, fried, marinated, served with various sauces and spices – not

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Guatemala to Mexico

to be missed. You will pay between US\$10 and US\$17 a plate, depending on how big the portions are. Note: Lobsters are only in season from mid-June to mid-February. The conch (shell fish) season begins when the lobster season ends. Shrimp are usually available year-round.

Local burritos – Belizean burritos are some of the best in the world. You can get vegetarian, chicken, shrimp or lobster fillings (US\$1.50 to US\$4 each). There is a fantastic chilli sauce to be found on every Belizean restaurant table called 'Marie Sharp' – it comes in mild, hot, extra hot and BEWARE HOT!

Drink

Central American fruit is fresh and cheap. There are some fantastic selections of fruit smoothie and juices on offer. Papaya, melon, watermelon, mango, and pineapple are all very popular. Smoothies can be made with either water or milk. Always specify if you don't want sugar. Latin Americans have a very sweet tooth and will usually automatically add the sugar.

Central America is known for its good beer. Belize beer is a little stronger in flavour than the other countries. Belikan Beer is the National beer. Ever since the pirates settled in Belize, rum has been the spirit of choice. White rum and coconut rum are most common. Belize is not known for its wine and it is best to order Chilean wine (although this may be expensive).

The tap water is safe to drink in mainland Belize. Bottled water is available on Caye Caulker, and water re-fills available at most stores.

Guatemala Country Guide

Guatemala - Fact File

- Official Name: Republic of Guatemala
- Capital: Guatemala City (often just called Guatemala, or even 'Guate')
- Population: 15.1 million
- Total Area: 108,890 square kilometres
- Official Language: Spanish 60%, Amerindian languages 40% (23 officially recognized, including including Quiche, Cakchiquel, Kekchi, Mam, Garifuna, and Xinka)

- Religions: Roman Catholic and indigenous Mayan beliefs
- Voltage: 110 volts
- Dialling Code: +502
- Time Difference: GMT/UTC -7
- Airport Departure Tax: US\$40 plus US\$3 security tax to be paid at airport

Guatemala - Visas

It is important to check the rules of your nationality with your nearest embassy or consulate however most nationals do not need a visa to enter Guatemala. On arrival you will be requested to show proof of your passport which must be valid for more than 6 months as well as proof of funds to support yourself. As a tourist you will be entitled to 90 days, however depending on the immigration official you may be allocated less. Anyone wishing to extend must submit an extension application to the Migration Directorate in Guatemala City.

You will be asked to fill out an immigration card which must be kept with your passport until you leave the country. Single entry tourist visas cost US\$25.

Guatemala is part of the Central America-4 (CA-4) Border Control Agreement. As part of this agreement eligible foreign nationals can travel within the four countries (El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras & Nicaragua) for a period of up to 90 days without completing entry and exit formalities at border immigration checkpoints. If travellers wish to remain in this area for more than 90 days they should research extensions. Overstayers can expect a fine.

Guatemala - Climate

Guatemala's rainy season runs from around May/June until September/October however in the majority of places this generally only means sporadic showers throughout the day which don't usually last very long. The only place where rain is guaranteed all year round is in the middle of the rainforest in Rio Dulce, where the rainy season can sometimes last until February. In the Guatemalan Highlands temperatures at night time are quite cool (Antigua, Lake Atitlan and especially Quetzaltenango). For example,

December/January nights in the highlands can drop to zero centigrade. Generally, the hottest time in Guatemala will be the months of April to May (before the rain comes!).

Visit www.worldclimate.com to get an idea of what the weather will be like on your tour.

Guatemala - Currency

The monetary unit in Guatemala is the quetzal. For up-to-date exchange rates with your own currency visit www.xe.com.

Changing money, credit cards & ATMs

US dollars are widely accepted in Guatemala however it is recommended to carry quetzals with you, especially smaller bills as larger bills may be harder to break in smaller towns and local establishments. Even if you have the option to pay in dollar it is recommended you pay in local currency.

We recommend you exchange this before entering the country to obtain the best exchange rates. Remember once out of Guatemala you will not be able to use or exchange quetzals (except in border towns) so we recommend you spend/exchange/donate any left over money before leaving the country.

US dollars and travellers cheques can be changed at casas de cambio (exchange bureau), banks and border crossings. Your tour leader will give you details of when and where best to change money. Casas de cambio are privately owned, usually have longer opening hours and attend to you faster than banks.

Another way to obtain local currency is to use the ATM machines located throughout most of Guatemala. Please note there will be a fee to use foreign credit or debit cards when withdrawing cash from an ATM. Although bank cards are often the easiest way to go, there are times where they will not work for you even if your bank at home tells you it will. Do not rely on your card as your only source of money. Always have a few back-ups with you.

In Guatemala you will never be able to use US dollar notes which are torn or marked even slightly. If your notes are at all damaged you

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Guatemala to Mexico

may use them in Belize, but not in Guatemala or Mexico.

Travellers checks are a safe way to carry money in Guatemala but they can be time consuming and you'll only be able to cash them in cities and tourist destinations with full service banks. American Express is the most common and widely accepted check but proof of purchase may be requested.

If you do decide to queue in a bank, always check that what you want to do is going to be possible before lining up. Different banks have different rules. For example some banks do not exchange travellers cheques. They may also have a limit to the amount of US dollars you can exchange. Always try to exchange as much as you can at one time and try to ask cashiers for small notes "billetes pequeñas" as you will find it very difficult to break large notes throughout Latin America.

Always make sure you put your cash inside your money belt before you leave the premises. Pickpockets tend to loiter near banks and change houses.

Guatemala - Tipping

A 10% sales tax is usually included in the price of hotels, shops and restaurants however may be added to your bill if not. If it is not added on, it is still expected (especially in higher end restaurants). You are not expected to tip taxi drivers unless they go out of their way for you although you should tip anyone who helps with your luggage, approx 50-80cents (Q5). Tour guides are usually tipped 10% and it is common practice to leave spare change to the small comedores.

Guatemala - Shopping

Guatemala's markets have some of the best shopping in Central America and are best for local products. With so much to choose from it's hard to choose what to buy but there are jade and wood carvings, ceramics, basketry as well as Mayan jewellery. The Central Market and Craft Market in Guatemala City, as well as Chichicastenango and the Highland area of Guatemala has by far the best bargains and most variety, due to the strong indigenous influence in this area (Antigua and Lake Atitlan). Bargaining is expected whilst

shopping in the markets of Guatemala. In shops it is considered rude to bargain, but you can ask for a 'discount' ('descuento' in Spanish).

Guatemala - Local Transport

Taxis are cheap in Guatemala and we recommend using them at night. Most taxis do not have meters, so you will have to agree on a price before getting in the cab.

The 'chicken buses' (locally called camonetas) are in fact old second-hand American school buses which have been painted in all sorts of bright colours and covered with religious decorations! They are extremely cheap for getting around and they go everywhere! They're safe to use as long as you use common sense - beware of thieves and pickpockets. These buses become very crowded, sometimes 6 people to one seat and it's not uncommon to hear a few chicks clucking away on market day! Bear in mind that the drivers often drive like lunatics and sometimes don't come to a complete stop when letting you on or off. These buses are privately run, so time is money. The more stops they make, the more money they make! A boy will come along to collect your money - usually a few quetzales - after you sit down (if you get a seat!). In most of the places we visit in Guatemala, walking is the best and cheapest way to see the sights.

Guatemala - Local Food & Drink

People are often surprised by the quality and variety on offer in Guatemala. This is partly due to the number of ex-pats who have opened up a range of different international restaurants. There is also local cuisine to suit every budget. Chicken, pork and beef are available throughout. Most meals come with corn tortillas and sometimes salad, but often lack hot vegetables. Although you might expect the food to be spicy in this region ('picante' in Spanish), this is not usually the case. Your tour leader will be able to recommend restaurants.

Food

Corn (maize), is the staple diet of Guatemala's indigenous people and you will certainly get

a lot of it. Mostly in the form of tortillas which are flat pancake-like things made of corn dough and grilled. The following are a few Guatemalan specialties:

Tamales – Corn dough stuffed with meat, fruit and nuts, wrapped in banana leaves.

Kaq Iq – Turkey soup with herbs from the Alta Verapaz region.

Bistec or Pollo Asado - Beef steak or grilled chicken. These are common meals, usually served with tortillas, rice, spring onion, white cheese, and salad.

If you have any allergies to foods, please come prepared with a list to give to your tour leader who can then translate it into Spanish for you to show every waiter who takes your order. If you are vegetarian you must always specify 'no carne, puerco, pollo, pescado' etc etc.

In general we do not recommend you buy food off the street, however your tour leader will give advice, e.g. certain streets in Antigua where the local ladies prepare everything well. If you are unsure just try to use common sense and avoid any food that has been sitting around for a long time (and a word of advice – avoid the bright yellow hot chips sold on every road-side).

Vegetarians

If you are a strict vegetarian you may experience a distinct lack of variety in the food available, especially in small towns. You might find that you are eating a lot of omelettes and other egg dishes. Our tour leaders will do their best to provide interesting vegetarian alternatives when arranging group meals in the campsite, but your patience and understanding is requested.

Drink

Guatemalan fruit is fresh and cheap. Go to one of the many juice stands and ask for a fruit smoothie "liquado de fruta" with one of the many ingredients to choose from including melon, watermelon, mango, pineapple as well as celery and beetroot. The smoothies are usually made with water or milk and you must always specify if you don't want sugar as Latin American's tend to have a very sweet tooth.

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Guatemala to Mexico

You will also find all sorts of orange, grape, lemon, and lime soft drinks (“Gaseosas”). “Agua Mineral” is sparkling water.

Generally speaking it’s best not to expect good coffee/tea in this part of the world, even though some of the best coffee in the world is produced here, the majority is exported. Be warned that Americano is the most common, followed by “café con leche” (more like milk with a bit of coffee), and cappuccino.

If you only learn one word in Spanish it’s bound to be “Cerveza”. There are countless lagers, and a few dark beers. A beer will cost you anywhere between US\$1.50 and \$3. The most common are ‘Gallo’ and ‘Tona’, with the more premium ones being ‘Modelo’ and ‘Dorada’.

Guatemalan rum is considered some of the best in the world. Ron Centenario Zacapa is a locally made award-winning rum. Guatemala is not known for its wine and it is best to order Chilean wine.

Mexico Country Guide

Mexico - Fact File

- Official Name: United States of Mexico
- Capital: Mexico City (often just called Mexico (Me-hee-ko) or more commonly D.F. (de. efe), for Distrito Federal
- Population: 120.9 million
- Total Area: 1.9 million square kilometres
- Official Language: Spanish. Indigenous languages sometimes spoken include Nahuatl and Mayan
- Religions: Roman Catholic 89%, protestant 6%
- Voltage: 110 volts, US-style two flat-pinned sockets
- Dialling Code: +52
- Time Difference: GMT/UTC -5
- Airport Departure Tax: There is a departure tax of approximately USD \$65 which is payable on departure from Mexico. This tax depends on which airline you are travelling with and your onward destination. Make sure you have the money just in case if you are unsure whether you need to pay it.

Mexico - Visas

It is important to check the rules of your nationality with your nearest embassy or consulate however most nationals do not need a visa to enter Mexico. On arrival you will be requested to show proof of your passport which must be valid for more than 6 months as well as proof of funds to support yourself. As a tourist you will be entitled to 90 days, however depending on the immigration official you may be allocated less.

Important - you will have to fill out an immigration form on arrival to which will be checked, stamped and left in your passport for the duration of your stay. Do not lose this bit of paper; If you do not produce this paper on departing Mexico you must pay a fine of US \$42.

Mexico has no entry fee however departure tax will be requested (please check your ticket to see if this is included or not), this usually costs approx. USD\$65. Anyone entering Mexico by land will have to pay a fee of USD\$20 to exit the country. Your tour leader will advise on this.

Mexico - Climate

Mexico’s winter season runs from around November to February where days are usually warm and sunny compared to the summer season which runs from June to August where days are very hot and humid with heavy rain showers. Altitude also plays a part in Mexico’s climate with cooler temperatures in the highly elevated locations such as Mexico City, Puebla, San Cristobal de las Casas and warmer tropical climates as you descend to sea level locations such as Cancun and Cuernavaca.

The hurricane season on the Caribbean side of Central America and the Gulf of Mexico runs from September to November. Usually this only means high winds and occasional storms. It is highly unlikely that the full force of a hurricane would hit any of the areas we pass through on our tours, however our tour leaders are fully prepared to take any necessary action and would make itinerary changes if required to ensure the safety of clients.

Visit www.worldclimate.com to get an idea of what the weather will be like on your tour.

Mexico - Money

Tipping

Service charges are rarely added to your bill however many of the staff depend on tips for their livelihood. Usually 15-20% is expected depending on how you found the service. You are not expected to tip taxi drivers unless they go out of their way for you although you should tip anyone who helps with your luggage, approx 50-80cents (5-10pesos). Tipping guides at the end of tours/excursions is always appreciated and your tour leader will advise you on this.

Entrance Fees

Generally speaking most museums in Mexico cost between US\$2 and US\$4. There are many interesting museums to visit, but please bear in mind that many museums close on Mondays or Tuesdays. The many beautiful churches and cathedrals of Mexico are always free to enter, but flash photography is strictly forbidden, and opening hours vary greatly.

There are sometimes cultural events going on and galleries/exhibitions which are free to enter. Your tour leader will give you more details on these. Mérida actually has a free historical walking tour of the city centre every morning, which is definitely worth doing.

You might also get the chance to take in an evening show. Perhaps the theatre or the ballet. Tickets for these are very reasonable and prices range from US\$5 to US\$20. Some evening shows (which include local traditional dances) are put on by the tourist office free of charge.

Mexico - Tipping & Entrance Fees

Tipping

A 10-15% service charge is added on to the restaurant bill throughout most of Mexico. If it is not added on, it is still expected (especially in the more expensive restaurants). There should be no other charge on top of this. You are not expected to tip taxi drivers unless they go out of their way for you although you should tip anyone who helps with your

Guatemala to Mexico - 13 days

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Guatemala to Mexico

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Mexico - Shopping

Haggling is expected in Mexico's street markets and can be a real highlight. La Merced in Mexico City and Mercado La Libertad in Guadalajara are some of the biggest in the country although each region will have their own regional handicrafts. If you see something that you like, buy it! As it may be more expensive in another region or you may never see it again. It is generally agreed that Oaxaca and San Cristóbal have the best bargains and most variety, partly due to the strong indigenous influence of surrounding villages.

Haggling in shops is not common practice and can be considered rude. Asking for a discount might be possible but this will depend on the shop.

Mexico - Local Transport

We recommend you use taxis for all journeys within a city. With the exception of larger cities taxis are not usually metered and you

will have to agree the price before starting your journey. It is a good idea to ask one of the hotel staff of your tour leader for a rough guide, so you know how much to pay roughly. It will also help if you speak some Spanish but as a general rule you have to pay more than the locals do. Mexico city's bus and underground metro system are also easy to use.

Mexico - Food & Drink

Food and drink in Mexico cost very little in comparison to what you would expect to pay at home. Breakfast can cost as little as US\$3, lunch can cost as little as US\$5.50 & dinner as little as \$9.50. Obviously, this depends on if you order additional drinks which will increase the bill. In smaller restaurants that the locals and backpackers use you can get meals from as little as US\$2

Mexican food is a mix of US, Spanish, Aztec and Mayan influences and is as vibrant and exciting as the country itself. Although the country has a reputation for spicy food, you can usually choose whether you would like to make the food spicy or not, and there are usually various chilli sauces and salsas on the tables in restaurants should you wish to increase the spice.

Huevos rancheros is the most common breakfast dish consisting of fried eggs on hot corn tortillas topped with salsa and can be served with refried beans, Mexican style rice and guacamole. Other dishes include Pozole which is a traditional soup dating back to the Aztecs made from meat, dried maize kernels, and toppings such as cabbage, onion, garlic and salsa. One that certainly deserves a mention is mole sauce, commonly served with chicken, turkey or enchiladas of chicken/turkey. Mole is a rich chilli sauce, thickened and enriched with nuts and seeds and augmented by various spices. The most famous is called "mole poblano" which is a dark brown colour as it has chocolate added to it.

Drink

All drinks such as water, soft or alcoholic drinks are at your own expense at all times. The following is a rough guideline for drinks bought in a shop in the street. Prices in

restaurants and hotels can sometimes be more than double the prices specified below:

- 1 litre of water US\$0.80
- Bottle of soft drink US\$1.00
- Bottle of national beer US\$1.40

Mexican fruit is fresh and cheap. Go to one of the many juice stands and ask for a "liquado de fruta" (fruit smoothie) or "jugo de naranja y zanahoria" (orange & carrot). Papaya, melon, watermelon, mango, and pineapple are very popular. Always specify if you don't want sugar ("sin azucar"). Latin Americans have a very sweet tooth and will usually automatically add the sugar.

Generally speaking it's best not to expect good coffee/tea in this part of the world. Be warned that Americano (weak black coffee) is the most common, followed by "café con leche" (more like milk with a bit of coffee), and cappuccino (sometimes good). If you ask for tea ("té negro") you will get teabags. Always ask for "leche fria a parte" (cold milk on the side) as the alternative is likely to be a hot cup of milk with a tea bag inside.

If you only learn one word in Spanish it's bound to be Cerveza. There are countless lagers, and a few dark beers. The most common are Corona, Sol, XX, Pacifico, Montejo, with the more premium ones being Modelo and Bohemia. Also, two ways of drinking beer distinct to Mexico should be tried: A chelada is a beer already prepared with lime and salt. A michelada is the same only with a special chilli sauce added. White rum (ron) and unsurprisingly tequila are definitely the most commonly drunk spirits in Mexico. Kahlua is also Mexican. Mexico is not known for its wine and it is best to order Chilean wine.

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