

MEXICO: COLOURS AND FLAVOURS

1 - 17 NOVEMBER 2024

FROM
£7,480
PER PERSON

Tour Leader: Chris Caldicott


The Ultimate
TRAVEL COMPANY



Join Chris Caldicott on this remarkable journey to Mexico discovering its ancient civilisations, colonial art and architecture, regional cuisines and vibrant cultural traditions. We begin with a visit to the magnificent Mayan remains and idyllic Caribbean beaches of Tulum.

From here we will tour the Yucatan visiting both epic archaeological sites like Chichen Itza, and Uxmal and lesser visited off the beaten track sites like Kabah hidden in the jungle.

From the gorgeous colonial era town of Merida, we will fly to the atmospheric 16th century historic city of Oaxaca to see the monumental Zapotec ruins at Monte Alban and feast on delicious regional culinary treats. A road trip through jungle clad hills will bring us to the hidden gem of Puerto Escondido (meaning hidden port) on the Pacific Coast, a mellow hideaway of artists and surfers.

The tour ends exploring the fascinating sights of Mexico City, including Teotihuacan, site of the renowned pyramids of the Sun and the Moon and time for shopping at the famous Sabado Market in San Angel.



17-DAY ITINERARY, DEPARTING 1 NOVEMBER 2024

1 November London / Cancun / Tulum

Suggested flight (not included in the cost of the tour) British Airways BA 2203 departing London Gatwick at 10.45 hrs arriving in Cancun at 16.45 hrs.

On arrival, meet your guide and transfer to Tulum and check into the modern boutique Aloft hotel, located close to both the town centre and picturesque Caribbean beaches, where three nights are spent. Dinner at the hotel.

2 November Tulum

Morning at leisure to enjoy the hotel's amenities or spend the day relaxing on the beach or shopping in Tulum town.

Lunch under own arrangements. Drive to Dos Ojos Cenote and see the largest system of underwater caves and grottos on earth. Guides will accompany you into the underwater world, a dreamland with crystal clear water where you can literally sense the timeless forces of nature. Here you will be able to explore a stretch of 500m of the cave, which is painted in a fascinating play of light and colours. Return to the hotel.

Dinner at an authentic Caribbean beach restaurant nestled among palm trees under the open sky.

3 November Tulum

Dawn visit to the Tulum ruins before returning to the hotel for breakfast. After breakfast return to the Mayan rock fortress of Tulum, perched on a cliff overlooking the Caribbean Sea. The ruins are some of the earliest known archaeological treasures in Mexico's Yucatan Peninsula and the only Mayan city built on the coast. Return to the hotel for breakfast.

Lunch under own arrangements. Afternoon at leisure. Dinner at a local fish restaurant on the beach.

4 November Tulum / Chichen Itza

Depart by coach to visit the Mayan ruins of Coba in the subtropical spiny desert forests of Yucatan. The site is the nexus of the largest network of stone causeways of the ancient Maya world, and it contains many engraved and sculpted 'stele' that document ceremonial life and important events of the Late Classic Period (AD 600–900) of 'Mesoamerican' civilisation.

Continue to the city of Valladolid for lunch at a local restaurant. Discover the 'Mercado Municipal', a colourful market full of different flavours and charm. Continue to Chichen Itza, the most famous Mayan temple city, which was the capital of the Toltec Empire in the 12th century before it was reclaimed by the Mayans in the 13th century. The result is a

fascinating blend of Mayan and Toltec architecture, visible in its many fine temples and pyramids. Check into the Mayaland Hotel and Bungalows for one night, a jungle resort located in the middle of the Chichen Itza Archaeological Park with extensive tropical gardens. There will be an option to visit the ruins at dusk. Dinner at a local restaurant.

5 November Chichen Itza / Uxmal

There will be an option to visit Chichen Itza ruins before breakfast to get the perfect snapshot on your camera before returning for breakfast at the hotel. Continue to Mayapan, the last great capital of the Maya. The buildings are smaller and less sophisticated than in Chichen Itza. Structures are similar to the pyramid of Kukulcan. Drive to Labna which was built in Puuc style and is less well known than the big archaeological excavations in Yucatan, however no less interesting. Set in predominantly unspoilt surroundings, the city is impressive due to its ornate façades and beautiful relief of the rain god Chaac. Walk along one of the last preserved 'sacbes' which leads from the large palace to the 'El Mirador' temple, located on a pyramid, to the superb archways. 'Sacbes', the Maya roads, once connected Labna with neighbouring Sayil, Kabah and Uxmal.



Picnic lunch. Continue to Kabah, one of the most spectacular cities in Puuc style. The city is particularly famous for its Palace of the Masks, which is also called Codz Poop 'rolled-up mat'. The facade and the sides of the building are completely covered by 260 Chaac masks (the number of days in a holy year). Continue to Uxmal and check into the Hacienda Uxmal for one night. A blend of traditional Mayan and Spanish style, the historic Hacienda Uxmal is located next to the UNESCO World Heritage Site of the Uxmal pyramids and temples. Dinner at the hotel's restaurant.

6 November Uxmal / Merida

This morning visit Uxmal, meaning 'thrice built' in the Mayan language. It is one of the most famous cities and dates from 10 AD. It is considered one of the most complex and beautiful examples of Puuc architecture, characterised by low horizontal palaces around courtyards and decorated with rich sculptural details. Depart for Sotuta de Peón, the only working henequén hacienda in the world.

Lunch under own arrangements. Continue to Hacienda Yaxcopoil, dating back to the 17th century, whose history covers three of the great periods in the Yucatan Peninsula: the pre-Columbian period, the Spanish colonial period, and the boom years of henequen cultivation during the

late 19th and early 20th centuries. Named after nearby Mayan ruins, it was once considered one of the most important rural estates in the Yucatan due to its size and magnificence. Continue to Merida, the vibrant capital of the Mexican state of Yucatan. Check into the Wayan Mundo Imperial Hotel, a green oasis located in García Ginerés, one of Mérida's oldest and most iconic neighbourhood, where two nights are spent. Dinner at a local Yucatán restaurant.

7 November Merida

Morning walking tour of Merida. Founded in 1542, the town impresses with its colonial charm, narrow streets, and romantic horse-drawn carriages. The influence of Spain and France can be seen all over the city. The Champs-Élysées, for example, was the model for the Paseo de Montejo. On your walk you will see the cathedral, the Palacio Municipal, and the Casa de Montejo, the house where the founder of the city was born. Experience a chilli sauce tasting of the famous 'Salsa Picante Dzemul', in the house of Donatila Amada Cruz Argaez.

Lunch at a local restaurant. Afternoon at leisure to peruse the local markets around Paseo Montejo. There will be an option to visit the Gran Museo del Mundo Maya, a state government project, which opened in 2012 and is intended as a place for both locals

and foreigners to learn about the former civilisations of Yucatan. There are six halls where you can marvel at permanent and temporary exhibitions with archaeological finds. Or alternatively, you can visit The Garcia Ponce, displaying works by Fernando Castro Pacheco, Fernando Garcia Ponce and Gabriel Ramirez Aznar. There will also be an option to visit the Floris Panthion Cemetery. Return to the hotel. Dinner at the hotel.

8 November Merida / Oaxaca

This morning transfer to the airport for an early morning domestic flight to Oaxaca, known for its Zapotec and Mixtec indigenous groups. Transfer to Monte Alban, the Zapotec capital, magnificently situated ruins on an artificially flattened hilltop. The ruins are surrounded by a circle of terraces, houses, temples and tombs on the slope of the hill where the general population of about 50,000 people lived.

Brunch at a local restaurant. Check into the Quinta Real Hotel, a beautifully restored 16th century ex-convent of Santa Catalina located in the heart of Oaxaca, where three nights are spent. Afternoon at leisure shopping, relaxing, and exploring the city. Dinner at the hotel.

9 November Oaxaca

Stroll through old cobbled streets of Oaxaca visiting the Santo Domingo



Church and Monastery, now a museum, which was founded by the Dominican Order in 1572. The museum includes an important collection of pre-Columbian artefacts, including a number from Monte Alban. The former monastery garden is now an ethno-botanical garden, containing a large collection of plants native to the region. Visit Zocalo, one of the many colourful and bustling markets in Mexico.

Lunch at a local street vendor. Afternoon visit to Oaxaca market. Return to the hotel. Dinner at a local restaurant to try the traditional mole which Oaxaca is famous for.

10 November Oaxaca

Travel to Santa Maria del Tule and see the 2,000-year-old Montezuma cypress tree, known as the 'El Arbol del Tule', which is one of the oldest, largest, and widest trees in the world. Its gnarled trunk and branches are filled with shapes that have been given names such as 'The Elephant' and 'The Pineapple'. Continue to Yagul and visit the ruins there. The temple area was built in the 5th century BC by the Zapotecs and later expanded by the Mixtec. The mosaic walls of the palace still show traces of former paint. Drive to the ruins of Mitla which was once an important Zapotec religious and ceremonial centre.

Lunch at a local restaurant. Continue to the small village of Santiago Matatlan where you will visit a mezcal

distillery. The famous Mexican liquor from the flesh of agaves contains more than 40% alcohol. It is produced from the heart of the plant after it has blossomed for the first time. The leaves are cut, and the 'piña' is cooked and ground. The mash is then obtained, fermented, and distilled several times. Return to the hotel. Dinner under own arrangements.

11 November Oaxaca / Puerto Escondido

Depart for Asilah, a fortified seaside. Drive to San Jose del Pacifico, a mountain range at 2,500m above sea level, often known as the 'Mushroom Capital of Mexico', for a walking tour with a mushroom scout. The mountain village has become internationally famous for its hallucinogenic mushrooms. The forest has the ideal conditions for growing various kinds of mushrooms, due to its humid climate creating a mist. The mushrooms are used by the indigenous people for cooking, and for religious rituals too.

Picnic lunch before driving to Pluma del Hidalgo, a coffee village. Learn about the cultivation of coffee. The constant supply of humid air from the Pacific provides the region with an ideal climate for growing coffee. Drive to Puerto Escondido and check into Hotel Santa Fe for three nights, a colonial style hotel located right on the beach between Playa Marinero and Playa Zicatela, Dinner at the hotel.

12 November Puerto Escondido

Morning visit to Casa Wabi Artists' Residence, an arts charity established by Mexican artist Bosco Sodi.

Lunch at a local restaurant. Afternoon at leisure to relax and enjoy the beach. Dinner under own arrangements.

13 November Puerto Escondido

Morning at leisure with lunch under own arrangements.

This afternoon head to Playa Carrizalillo, a beautiful white sandy beach set in a sheltered cove reached by a stairway of 157 steps. Return to the hotel. Dinner at a local restaurant.

14 November Puerto Escondido / Mexico City

Early morning transfer to the airport for a domestic flight to Mexico City.

Lunch at a local restaurant. Enjoy a walking tour of the city, including a drink on the 41st floor of the Torre Latinoamerica for views of the city, the Palacio de Belles Artes and the Diego Rivera mural in the Alameda Central. Stop and have a drink at Cantina Tio Pepe, one of the city's oldest and most traditional watering holes. Also visit the Mercado 77 San Juan food market and the Centro de Artesanias la Ciudadela craft market. Check into the Histórico Central Hotel, set within an elegant 18th century building in the heart of Mexico City, where two nights are spent. Dinner at a local restaurant.



15 November Mexico City

Morning visit to the ruins of Teotihuacan, the site of the world-renowned Pyramids of the Sun and the Moon. During its peak, the ancient city was home to approximately 26,000 people and was the capital of Mexico's largest pre-Hispanic empire. The city was divided into quarters by two great avenues that met near the so called Ciudadela. Visit the fascinating Avenue of the Dead where the buildings and tombs have been preserved.

Lunch at a local restaurant. Afternoon at leisure for more sightseeing or shopping. Return to the hotel. Dinner under own arrangements.

16 November Mexico City

Check out of the hotel and drive to San Angel and visit Sabado (Saturday) Market for some shopping. Continue to the Museo Casa Estudio Diego Rivera, adjoining houses where the artist couple Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo lived, built in Bauhaus style marking the beginning of modern architecture in Mexico.

Lunch at a local restaurant. Drive to Coyoacan to visit the cobalt blue house, belonging to Frida Kahlo. This museum is dedicated to the life and work of the Mexican Artist. Continue to the house of Leon Trotsky who was murdered by one of Stalin's agents with an ice pick. Many objects have been left in the place where they

were found on the day of the attack; photos and Trotsky's personal library shed light on the life of the founder of the Red Army and of his strong relationship with Mexico. In the well-maintained garden area, you can see Trotsky's grave. Light dinner at a local restaurant before departing for the airport. Suggested flight home (not included in the cost of the tour) British Airways BA 242 departing Mexico City at 21.00 hrs.

17 November London

Flight arrives London Heathrow at 13.10 hrs.



TOUR PRICES PER PERSON

Tour Price	£7,480
Single Supplement	£1,660

Please note we have not included the cost of the flights in the tour price. Please contact us for prices should you wish to book them through us.

PRICE INCLUDES

- Domestic flights as shown in the itinerary
- Accommodation throughout as shown in the itinerary
- Breakfast daily; 9 lunches, 2 picnic lunches and 13 dinners
- All entrance fees, visits and excursions as per the itinerary
- All transportation as detailed in the itinerary
- Local English-speaking guide/s
- Gratuities to driver/s; gratuities to guide/s; gratuities in restaurants; portage
- The services of your tour leader throughout

PRICE EXCLUDES

- International flights
- Travel insurance
- Items of personal expenditure (e.g. telephone calls / laundry etc.)
- Visitax in Mexico
- Government levies or taxes introduced after costing and publication of this programme on 11.10.23



YOUR TOUR LEADER



CHRIS CALDICOTT

Since travelling to some of the most remote parts of the world as Photographer-in-Residence to the Royal Geographical Society, Chris Caldicott has continued his globetrotting lifestyle as a freelance photographer, writer and lecturer specialising in food and travel. He has had several books published about food, travel and the spice trade and visited 118 countries on assignments to capture evocative images and write about memorable experiences for publications such as Vanity Fair, Condé Nast Traveller, The Sunday Times, Harpers Bazaar, Tatler, House and Garden and The Telegraph. Chris will offer an initial workshop at the beginning of the trip on how to take better travel photographs and get the best out of your camera covering exposure, focus and composition illustrated with examples of his own work. He will also be offering one to one tutorials on photography and individual cameras and curating opportunities to capture creative images of the journey.



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