



# ELITE MEXICO EXPERIENCES

## MEXICO'S MAGNIFICENT PYRAMIDS

Mexico boasts an astounding 38,102 archeological sites—spread over landscapes as diverse as deserts, mountains, jungles and even heavily-populated urban areas—175 of which are open to the public for exploration. Of these sites, the territory's majestic pyramids are probably the best-known and most sought-after attractions. These unique and enduring structures have become icons of the ancient world, telling the stories of the lost Aztec, Mayan and pre-Hispanic civilizations. Here, stunning design, breathtaking natural beauty and rich culture collide. For a getaway that's as exciting as it is eye-opening, read on.



[www.visitmexico.com](http://www.visitmexico.com)



PREHISPANIC ARCHITECTURE / MEXICO CITY



THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL ZONE / TEOTIHUACAN



TEMPLO MAYOR / MEXICO CITY

## SITES IN CENTRAL MEXICO

Mexico's most bustling region is also one of its most historically significant. From the remnants of ancient cities that once stood in place of modern-day Mexico City, to the ruins at Veracruz, Tlaxcala and Oaxaca, this area is a veritable treasure trove for would-be archaeologists and elite explorers. It's also home to some of the nation's finest hotels, combining signature Mexican hospitality with ultra-luxe accommodations.

### STATE OF MEXICO

Today the Archaeological Zone in **Teotihuacan** is one of the most frequently visited tourist destinations in Mexico—but in pre-Hispanic Mexico, it was one of the largest and most complex urban centers in the New World. The site's main structures include the **Pyramid of the Sun** and the **Temple of Quetzalcoatl**, while an on-site museum provides guests with a sense of the lost city's rich, centuries-long history. The remarkable **Feathered Serpent Pyramid**, with ornate details like carved serpents and colorful reliefs, is another popular stop.

Another standout settlement is **Tenochtitlan**, the one-time Aztec capital now recognized as Mexico City. Before it was the nation's capital, not to mention the third largest metropolitan area in the world, Mexico City was home to the earliest beginnings of advanced civilization. Strolling through the **Zocalo**, which has been considered the heart of the city since Aztec rule, you'll be amazed by the contrast between

the ancient mystique of its frescoes and the thriving modern city that surrounds them. In the time of Moctezuma I, this space was filled with temples and palaces, but today it's one of the liveliest and largest public squares in the world, second only to Moscow's Red Square. Conveniently located in downtown Mexico City, **Templo Mayor** is home to the remains of the cornerstone of Aztec civilization, the Grand Temple, which was built in honor of the gods. This small site also boasts an eye-opening museum filled with objects found during the excavation and restoration of Tenochtitlan. Located in the Tlalpan district, **Cuicuilco** is among the oldest pre-Hispanic urban areas in Mexico. Along with well-preserved ruins of the remarkable city infrastructure, such as residences and a water works system, you'll find a fascinating five-level round terraced pyramid—widely interpreted as an early Aztec attempt to build a relationship between religion and the cosmos.



EL TAJIN / VERACRUZ



MURAL / TLAXCALA



MONTE ALBÁN / OAXACA

## SITES IN CENTRAL MEXICO...CONT'D

### VERACRUZ

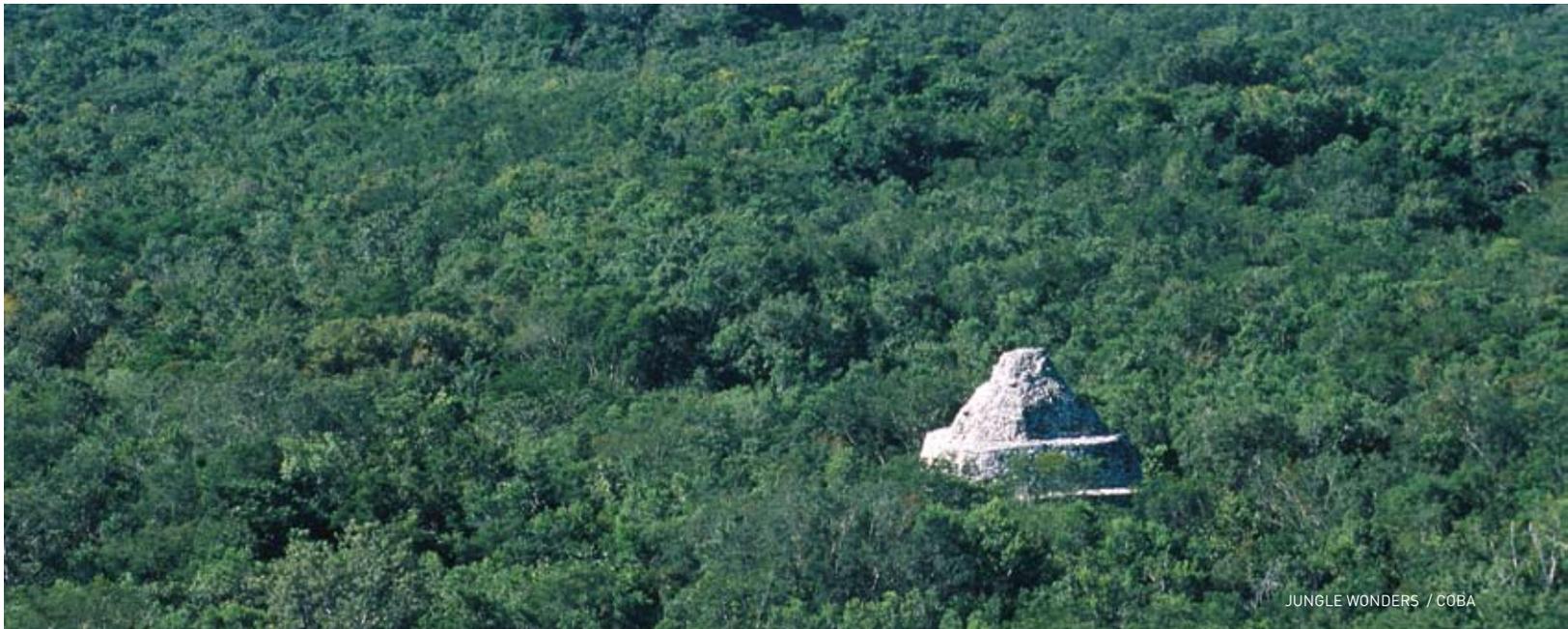
In the area just outside of Veracruz there are a few striking archaeological zones that are well worth a visit. The pre-Hispanic city of **El Tajin** draws its name from the belief that 12 gods of thunderstorms, collectively known as "Tajin," live among its ruins. Its unique architecture is marked by elaborately carved reliefs on the columns and friezes. Here you'll marvel at the **Pyramid of the Niches**, a masterpiece of ancient Mexican construction that proves the country's unique architecture easily rivals that of Egypt. Other notable sites include the ruins of **Quiahuiztlan**, which offer up an incredible panoramic ocean view.

### TLAXCALA

There are several important settlements dating back to the pre-Hispanic era in the area immediately surrounding Tlaxcala. Visit **Cacaxtla**, considered by many to be the state's most important archaeological site, for beautiful and colorful murals that offer a glimpse into the lives of the Olmeca-Xicalanca people who once inhabited it. Nearby Xochitecatl is home to the captivating **Pyramid de las Flores** (Pyramid of the Flowers), which boasts the fourth-largest base among Mesoamerican structures. Following a climb to the top of the structure, an inspiring view of the tree-lined valley below awaits.

### OAXACA

Nestled in the beautiful Oaxaca valley, just outside the capital, is the dramatic **Monte Albán** site. This gargantuan ceremonial complex of terraces, temples and pyramids gives tourists a fascinating glimpse into pre-Columbian culture in Mexico, constructed by a civilization that was highly skilled in building. As the Zapotec capital, it was built on an expansive site that once dominated the landscape. Touring the now-crumbling lost city, with its golden stone peaks set against a brilliant blue sky, it's hard to imagine what this site would have looked like back in 800 A.D. when it supported a population of an estimated 30,000 people. Although it's one of Mexico's most excavated archaeological sites, it still maintains much of its original mystery. An on-site museum and bookstore provide a wealth of knowledge.



JUNGLE WONDERS / COBA

## DISCOVERIES OF THE YUCATAN PENINSULA

Along Mexico's eastern shores, you'll find a wealth of interesting archaeological ruins that date back to the Mayan era. In this region you'll experience ancient settlements in a range of breathtaking backdrops: From the Mayan era's only beachfront city, **Tulum**, to sites in lush jungle settings like Chiapas' **Palenque**.

### CANCUN

Take a look at Cancun's strip of chic, modern resorts and well-groomed beaches and it's hard to believe that you're just a drive away from some of the world's most intriguing ancient structures. Of these, the closest archaeological zone is **El Meco**, less than four miles north. First opened to the public in 2001, this serenely beautiful site draws a crowd with its temple ruins, remains of several columns and a well-preserved pyramid in the style of the Postclassic period.

Centuries ago, **Coba** was one of the Mayan era's most important cities for its political and commercial activities, not to mention one of the most populous. The city's grandeur is not lost on modern visitors, who are greeted by an astounding 82-foot high temple standing in the midst of the Coba Group, a collection of urban structures. Even more impressive is the **Nohoch Mul** pyramid, one of the tallest constructions in Mayan history. Climb this nearly 140-foot-tall structure and you'll be rewarded with magnificent views of the surrounding emerald canopy.

Perhaps the most oft-cited example of ancient Mexican architecture is **Chichen Itza**, which was recently named one of the "seven new wonders of the world." Jaw-dropping jungles encompass extraordinary attractions like a castle with 365 steps known as the **Pyramid of Kukulkan** and **Juego de Pelota**, the largest ball court in Mesoamerica. Declared a World Heritage Site by UNESCO, it is the home of some of the pre-Hispanic era's most distinguished structures. Private tours of this site also stop at local villages and colonial towns, allowing visitors to experience the warmth of Mexico's locals along the way.



PYRAMID OF KUKULKAN / CHICHEN ITZA



ANCIENT SETTLEMENT / TULUM



STRIKING ARCHITECTURE / UXMAL

## DISCOVERIES OF THE YUCATAN PENINSULA...CONT'D

### TULUM

Built by a cliff overlooking the Caribbean Sea and dotted with flourishing bougainvillea, **Tulum** is a small but truly enchanting site. This ancient settlement was once one of the most important in the region; today you'll find the remains of temples, a castle and the house of the ruler, **Halach Uinic** (translated as the "True Man"). Walls surround three of its sides—making it the only walled city in the vicinity—while two watchtowers still stand on the site. It's also the only archaeological site in the region that overlooks the coast, giving visitors easy access to Yucatan's gorgeous white-sand beaches. One of the most popular archaeological sites among tourists, this site is recognized as a national park, and has been built up over the years to include tranquil lodgings and great restaurants serving authentic Mexican fare.

### CHIAPAS

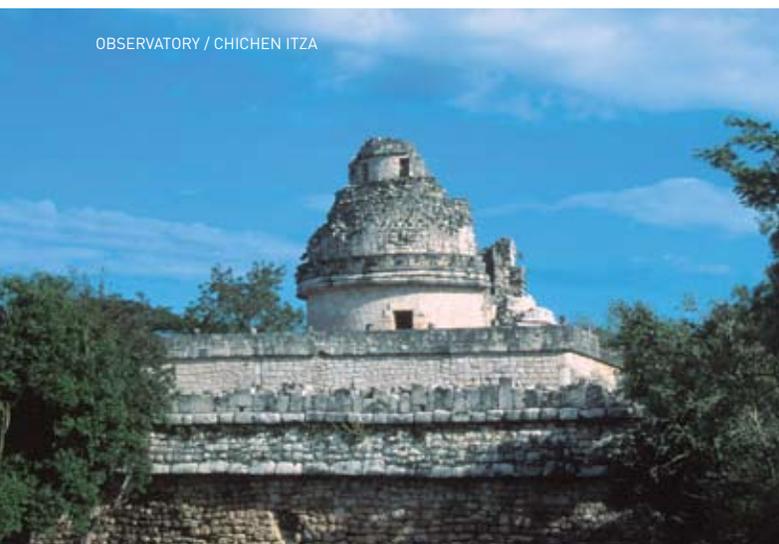
You can easily travel to Mexico's southernmost state from Cancun or Mexico City. Within close proximity of a circuit of ruins known as the **Ruta Puuc**, or Puuc Route, this region is a key stop for those with an interest in the ancients.

Located in a flourishing rainforest in **Palenque**, the awe-inspiring structures pop against bountiful natural greenery. You'll find an astonishing

500-plus constructions over an area of about ten square miles in this ancient city—however, most of the excavated structures are within a relatively contained space, making for easier touring of the site. If you'd like to extend your stay by the settlement, a nearby town is home to many family-run hotels and restaurants for a true taste of life in Mexico.

With a name that means "thrice built," **Uxmal** is a late-classic Mayan site that dates back to around the 10th century A.D. or earlier. Situated over hilly terrain—"Puuc" means "hilly country"—this impressive settlement occupies nearly 150 acres and is surrounded by forests teeming with brightly-colored flowers. Here you'll find the jaw-dropping **Magician's Pyramid**. Though it is sometimes referred to as the Pyramid of the Dwarf, there's nothing small about this 115-foot structure, the tallest in Uxmal. In addition to its sheer height, this pyramid is noteworthy for its unique style: With its rounded sides, steepness and painted plaster-covered exterior, it's a standout among ancient Mexican architecture.

For more information, or to plan your next elite adventure, check out [www.visitmexico.com](http://www.visitmexico.com)



### WHAT TO KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

THE GUIDELINES BELOW WILL HELP ENSURE THAT YOUR TRIP TO ONE OF MEXICO'S MANY ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES IS PAST-PERFECT—NO MATTER WHAT PYRAMID YOU CHOOSE TO PERUSE.

#### OBSERVE HOURS

All of Mexico's archaeological sites are overseen by INAH, the National Institute of Anthropology and History, so the majority of them hold similar hours—usually 8 or 9am until 5 or 6pm (visit [www.inah.gob.mx](http://www.inah.gob.mx) for details on specific sites). While attractions might be open all day, your best bet is to show up either early morning or late afternoon to avoid getting scorched by the heat—or worse, being stuck behind busloads of tourists.

#### DRESS THE PART

Sneakers or hiking boots are a safe choice for all-day climbing and walking on rocky terrain. Lightweight, light-colored clothing, a hat and sunglasses are a must, given the strength of the sun's rays.

#### COME PREPARED

Food and drinks other than water are often not permitted inside archaeological zones—so it's a good idea to bring your own bottle of H2O to stay hydrated while exploring. Another must-bring you might not expect: insect repellent, particularly when traveling to sites located in the jungle, like Palenque.

#### GET A GUIDE

Whether you rely on a trusted travel book as a reference or hire a local guide, most travelers who have navigated the pyramids insist the experience is even more rewarding when accompanied by someone who can impart key information, such as explaining the difference between the Mayas and the Aztecs. Some sites, including Monte Albán, have registered site guides available for hire at the ticket office upon arrival.

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## ELITE SLEEPS

Though you'll tour the resting places of ancient gods and kings, your lodgings will be anything but antiquated, thanks to the luxurious amenities and modern technologies at these fine hotels and resorts.



### ST. REGIS MEXICO CITY

Located in the heart of the capital on Paseo de la Reforma, the St. Regis Mexico City puts you in prime position to enjoy the surrounding region's rich history. Designed by architect Cesar Pelli, this iconic hotel features a striking exterior to match the classically elegant design of its 189 guest rooms and suites. Enjoy a range of cuisines, from fresh Mediterranean in the Diana restaurant, to health-conscious fare at the onsite juice bar. Posh extras include a fitness center, boutique shopping, indoor pool, covered valet parking and full-service spa.

Contact: General Manager Rui Reis, 52-55-5228-1818; [stregis.starwoodhotels.com/mexico](http://stregis.starwoodhotels.com/mexico)



### HACIENDA TEMOZÓN

Equal parts modern luxury and laid-back Mexican tradition, the Hacienda Temozón brings the best of the old and the new together. It's also conveniently located just a few miles from the ruins at Uxmal. The hotel's small size—with just 28 guest rooms and suites in total—allows for both privacy and personalized service. Book the Presidential Suite for the most authentic experience of all: Equipped with its own woven cotton hammock and private pool, it was once the Hacienda owner's bedroom.

Contact: General Manager Walter Harbich, 52-99-9923-8089;  
[www.luxurycollection.com/temozon](http://www.luxurycollection.com/temozon)



### OCCIDENTAL GRAND COZUMEL

This breathtaking all-inclusive resort on the island of Cozumel offers the option of chartered excursions to archaeological sites like Tulum, Chichen Itza and Xel-ha. 251 bright, spacious guest rooms come equipped with comforts like satellite TVs and stocked mini-fridges, while in the separate Royal Club section of the hotel, the Presidential Suite takes luxury to another level with its own private pool, whirlpool and concierge. The Occidental Grand Cozumel's nightly entertainment—not to mention six restaurants, three bars and one disco—ensure that visitors will never have a dull moment, from sun up to sun down.

Contact: General Manager Jose Maria Figueroa, 52-98-7872-9730;  
[www.occidentalhotels.com](http://www.occidentalhotels.com)



### HILTON CANCUN GOLF & SPA RESORT

The oceanview accommodations at the Hilton Cancun Resort combine warm service with world-class facilities, making it a standout choice in Cancun's famed hotel zone. Seven pools, including one Infinity pool, make the resort's pool deck one of the most impressive in the area, while the white sand beach is the largest in Cancun. With Mayan archaeological sites right within reach, you can easily experience old-world wonders—whenever you're not partaking in a game on the championship golf course or reveling in a treatment at the poolside spa, that is.

Contact: General Manager Carlos Abauza, 52-99-8881-8000; [www.hilton.com](http://www.hilton.com)