

MEXICO - MEXICO & CUBA HIGHLIGHTS



TRIP CODE

MCPAMCH

DEPARTURE

Selected Saturdays

DURATION

23 Days

LOCATIONS

Mexico, Cuba



INTRODUCTION

Create unforgettable memories in two of Latin Americas most lively and eccentric countries on this 23 day Mexico & Cuba tour. Experience the best of Latin and Caribbean influences as you traverse these geographically close yet complete polar opposite landscapes. Starting in Mexico city, you will travel to the ruins of Teotihuacan before discovering the colonial legacy of Oaxaca and Puebla. Dive first into the history of the Maya as you experience Chichen Itza & the Palenque Maya ruins before flying off to Havana. Revel in the charming capital before moving to the Vinales region, famous for its cigar factories and tobacco farming, experience the colonial lane ways and cobblestone streets of Trinidad, visit the unique memorials of Che Guevara in Santa Clara.


ITINERARY

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DAY 1: Arrival in Mexico City

Arrive at Mexico City’s Benito Juarez International Airport; a complimentary transfer is included with your trip so please ensure you provide your flight details to your booking agent at least 14 days prior to travel so the transfer can be organised. You’ll meet your tour leader and other group members for a pre-tour briefing in the evening, which will be followed by an optional group dinner at a nearby restaurant. This is normally held at 6 pm but please check the notice board at reception to confirm the time and place. Please bring your passport, next of kin details and travel insurance documents along with you. Mexico City could easily keep you busy for a week, so you may want to consider arriving a day or two before the start of your trip. The Leon Trotsky and Frida Kahlo museums are two popular sights worth checking out that aren’t included in this trip. Trotsky, having come off second-best to Stalin in the Soviet era, was expelled and found refuge in Mexico City where he was eventually murdered, while Frida Kahlo is perhaps the most renowned Mexican artist in history.



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DAY 2: Mexico City

Visit the impressive National Museum of Anthropology before heading to the Zocalo (main square) for a trip to the Cathedral and National Palace. You’ll discover that Mexico City is an exciting mix of modern cosmopolitan glamour with remnants from both its ancient and colonial history. The tour will finish at approximately 3 pm, and in the evening your leader will take you on a taco crawl around town to try the locals’ favourite taquerias.



DAY 3: Teotihuacan & Mexico City

Travel by private vehicle to Teotihuacan, about 50 kilometres northeast of Mexico City. Here you'll discover the extraordinary ruins known as the Pyramid of the Sun and the Pyramid of the Moon, which dominate the skyline. This was once one of the country's biggest ancient cities and the Aztec capital. With the help of a local guide, you'll have time to stroll down The Avenue of the Dead to see fascinating clues as to what life here was like nearly 2000 years ago.



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DAY 4: Arrival at Oaxaca

Farewell Mexico City at approximately 8 am and head south to Puebla. The drive takes about 3 hours, depending on local traffic, and your leader will take you on a walk around town on arrival. Puebla has retained its colonial heritage despite rapid growth and development, and you'll visit Calle de los Dulces (Candy street) and El Parian (handicraft market), as well as the impressive Rosary Chapel and Town Hall Palace. Continue the journey south to Oaxaca (5 hrs drive), a city renowned for its cuisine, vibrant art scene and traditional Mexican handicrafts.



DAY 5: Oaxaca


Recognised as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, Oaxaca has much to offer to travellers and today you'll take a full day tour of the city including lunch at a local family's home. Your local guide will take you to the Mitla ruins, which were once the religious centre for the Zapotec peoples, and Hierve el Agua, a group of stunning natural rock formations where the minerals resemble cascading waterfalls. Sip on the famous, tequila-like local booze, mezcal, but not before checking out the Tule Tree, a 1500-year-old tree that's over 11 metres in girth. Later, learn about a peculiar tradition not many have the opportunity to witness when visiting Oaxaca: beeswax candle making. You will visit a local shop that keeps this tradition alive to learn about the technique involved in making these delicate candles and maybe have a go yourself. The evening is free for you to soak up the atmosphere and enjoy Oaxaca's nightlife.



DAY 6: Sumidero Canyon & San Cristobal de las Casas

Fly to Tuxtla Gutierrez at noon, the capital of the Chiapas state in southern Mexico. Travel by private vehicle to the Sumidero Canyon, an 800-metre deep canyon and World Heritage Site dating from the same time as the Grand Canyon. You'll take a boat tour on the Sumidero River, the canyon's architect, before continuing a further 1.5 hours to San Cristobal de las Casas. Expect to arrive by 7 pm, with the evening free for you take in the distinctive old-world feel courtesy of the Spanish colonial architecture and pretty, cobbled streets.



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DAY 7: San Cristobal de las Casas

Embark on a half-day tour this morning to the Maya villages of San Juan Chamula and Zinacantan. Nestled in the highlands, these villages serve as marketplaces and religious ceremonial centres for the indigenous people who live in the surrounding hills. The local people have retained their traditional way of life and are often seen dressed in their own distinctive colourful costumes. You'll explore these villages with a guide and learn more about the culture and history of these mainly Maya communities.



DAY 8: Palenque


Prepare for a long travel day as you depart San Cristobal de Las Casas and travel north to Palenque. You'll visit the Agua Azul waterfall on the way, so wear or pack your swimmers in your day pack. Cool off in the turquoise waters before continuing towards Palenque and expect to arrive around 6 pm. Situated in the jungle, Palenque is the jump-off point to the nearby Maya ruins of the same name which you'll visit tomorrow. Tonight enjoy an included dinner together.



DAY 9: Palenque Ruins & Campeche

Today you'll meet a local archaeologist for a memorable visit to the ruins of Palenque. Archaeologists have been hard at work uncovering the secrets of this ancient city, but around 90% of the site remains unexcavated and concealed in the forest. Sitting on a hilltop surrounded by thick trees, the ruins date back to AD600 and are some of the most impressive Maya relics in Mexico. The area gives you an idea of what the Spanish invaders must have seen when they first came across the hidden ruins, and try to listen out for the eerie calls of howler monkeys and the echoes of screeching parrots as you walk through the jungle. After lunch, you'll continue driving six hours north to Campeche, the last long travel day on this itinerary.



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DAY 10: Campeche

Campeche is a port city located on Mexico’s Yucatan Peninsula and was once the most important seaport for the Spanish conquerors. Campeche’s history is well-preserved and it was awarded World Heritage status as an urbanisation model of a baroque colonial town and because of the defensive walls and fortification system, a result of ongoing pirate attacks throughout the 16th and 17th centuries. Your leader will take you on a tour of the city in the morning, and the afternoon is yours to continue exploring or catch some rays and take a dip in the warm waters of the Gulf of Mexico.



DAY 11: Celestun Reserve & Merida


Continue along the coast this morning to visit the Celestun Bird Sanctuary and Biosphere Reserve where you'll take a guided boat tour. Here, near extensive beaches lined with coconut trees, you'll see a variety of coastal birds. Depending on the season (usually Nov-Mar), you may be lucky enough to witness thousands of flamingos painting a pink streak across the landscape. Arrive at the historic town of Merida in the evening and take an orientation walk with your leader before finding some Yucatan cuisine for dinner. Merida, founded in 1542, is the Yucatan capital and retains much of its old-world charm. Take in the splendour of its many colonial buildings and learn more about the Maya heritage of the town.



DAY 12: Merida

Today is a free day to explore the many sights of Merida and your leader will be able to recommend some good options. There are several museums including the impressive Regional Museum of Yucatan, and the streets are perfect for strolling and enjoying the city’s art and culture. Hang out in the green and shady Plaza Grande, with the 16th-century cathedral on one side and City Hall, the State Government Palace and Casa Mantejo on the other. For a taste of Merida's 19th-century glory, take a walk along the mansion-lined Paseo de Montejo. The outdoor market is another essential visit with an array of hammocks and Maya replicas for sale, plus a selection of mouth-watering local foods including a Yucatan specialty, cochinita pibil (little pig).



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DAY 13: Chichen Itza & Playa del Carmen

Depart Merida at 6.30 am and arrive at Chichen Itza when the doors open at 8 am. Named as one of the new Seven Wonders of the World, Chichen Itza is considered the most important archaeological vestige of the Maya-Toltec civilization in Yucatan by UNESCO. You'll take a two-hour guided tour of what is perhaps the most famous Maya site in Mexico, dominated by the Temple of Kukulcan, or El Castillo, a Mesoamerican step-pyramid. You'll also visit Ik Kil, one of the most beautiful cenotes (Fresh water natural rock pool) in Mexico. After an option to swim (remember to pack your swim gear in your day pack again), enjoy a buffet lunch. Continue approximately three hours to the Caribbean coast and Playa del Carmen. Blessed with azure waters, powdery beaches and an almost European feel, Playa del Carmen is a popular resort town famed for its coral reefs and excellent diving.



DAY 14: Playa del Carmen


Take today to enjoy Playa del Carmen as you see fit. Kick back with a book, stroll along the white sands or snorkel in crystal-clear waters. For adventures further afield, take a ferry across the turquoise seas to Cozumel, explore another cenote or take a guided tour of the nearby Tulum ruins. In the evening, settle in beachside and watch the world go by with a margarita in your hand.



DAY 15: Arrival at Havana

Today you will be transferred to Cancun Airport in time to catch your international flight to Havana. The international flight between Cancun and Havana is not included in the price of this trip and it must be purchased separately. Please contact us if you need assistance to make this arrangement. From Havana's Jose Marti International Airport you will be transferred to your hotel. Depending on the hotel you will find a welcome document. Please note there will be a welcome meeting at approximately 6PM.



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DAY 16: Havana

This morning at 9 am you will be picked up from the infamous Hotel Nacional to see outer-Havana in a convoy of classic American vintage cars that cruises via points of intrerest such as the Malecon, Revolucion Square, Vedado and ending in Old Havana. Next, your leader will take you on a walking tour of the lovely Old Havana (approximately 2.5 hours). Go to the cathedral, Plaza de Armas, San Francisco de Asis, Plaza Vieja and Central Park. Now that you are orientated in Old Havana you have the rest of the afternoon to lunch at leisure and explore futher. Your leader can assist you to take a taxi if you wish to return to the hotel.



DAY 17: Soroa & Vinales

This morning drive west to Soroa (one hour) to tour the beautiful orchid garden. A local expert will take you on a private tour of the gardens to identify the bird and plant species of this diverse area (approximately 45 minutes). You will easily see why the valley is known as the rainbow of Cuba. There will be time for lunch before continuing on to Vinales (1.5 hours), where tobacco and sugarcane fields lie side by side and limestone outcrops dot the landscape. Use this bus time to take part in an informal Spanish lesson so you can converse with the friendly locals throughout the rest of your trip. Check in to the guesthouses, leaving enough time to undertake a quick orientation walk. Later, perhaps enjoy the porch rocking chair and soak up the slow, old-world pace of rural Cuba as oxen plod gracefully along the streets.



DAY 18: Vinales

At 9 am go on a guided walk through the farm lands of Vinales (approximately 3 hours), which you'll soon see is home to some extraordinary scenery - some of Cuba's best. Learn more about the tobacco industry and see a farmer whip a world class cigar in seconds. Take some time to find a local place for lunch, then regroup around 4.30 pm to embrace the rhythm and learn a few steps in a salsa dancing class. Next, head to the top of the valley for dinner at an eco-farm. Everything is grown organically on the farm itself so get ready for one of the freshest dinner experiences in Cuba!



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DAY 19: Bay of Pigs & Cienfuegos

Prepare for a long travel day as you board the comfortable bus at 8am towards Cienfuegos. Drive back through Havana before stopping in the Bay of Pigs for lunch (approximately 5 hours). After lunch, go for a dip in the crystal clear water or simply sit back and try to imagine the battle played out in this monumental bay. Ask your leader for insight into the botched USA Military counter-revolutionary invasion in the Bay of Pigs. Then it is just a short drive to Cienfuegos (approximately 1 hour), one of Cuba's prettiest coastal spots. Arrive some time after 5pm and take a short orientation walk before visiting the Palacio del Valle, Cienfuegos' architectural pride and joy. Its grandiose carvings in Venetian alabaster strike an impressive pose in this beautiful seaside city.



DAY 20: Arrival in Trinidad


Enjoy a free morning to explore. Then complete the two hour drive to Trinidad. During a guided walk of the town (1 hour), take in its eye-catching combination of cobblestone streets, colourful houses and old-fashioned locals. It's a great town to explore on foot, and almost every scene offers superb photographic opportunities – from residents relaxing with huge cigars on their doorsteps to old Chevrolets cruising by. In the evening take a trip out of town to a local house for a homely and festive dinner. Be welcomed with the local drink; Canchanchara made from 'fire water', local honey and lime juice. There will even be a musician or two serenading you and your fellow travellers as you dine.



DAY 21: Trinidad

Today is a free day in Trinidad. For some beachside fun and perhaps a little snorkelling, head down to Playa Ancon. Just be careful you don't stand on a sea urchin. At some point while you're here, a great activity is to go to a folklore show at one of the town's numerous open-air venues. Cuba has a rich and varied music and dance tradition that draws roots from Spain, Africa and France, and this is your chance to experience it all first-hand, from the Mambo to the rumba.



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DAY 22: Santa Clara & Havana


Head inland to Santa Clara (approximately 1.5 hours) to lunch then visit the Che Guevara mausoleum. Here you'll see the statue of the iconic revolutionary leader looming. In the museum that accompanies the mausoleum, you'll find an intriguing spread of photos and other ephemera related to Che - letters, medical devices, firearms. Return to the capital (3 hours) for your final night to enjoy Havana.



DAY 23: Havana Departure

Your trip comes to an end after breakfast this morning as there are no activities planned for today. The day can be spent at your own leisure. However, you are required to comply with the hotel's internal check-out rules, so please factor that into your plans.



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INCLUSIONS & DETAILS	
Accommodation	Standard
Inclusions	Private airport transfers Internal flights as part of this itinerary Accommodation with breakfast daily Sightseeing with local English-speaking guide as detailed in itinerary Other meals where stated Exclusions International flights Visa and reciprocity fees (if applicable) Travel insurance Beverages Personal expenses Gratuities for tour guides and drivers Any items not mentioned as included
Difficulty Rating	1 (easy)
Single Surcharge	Available upon request, contact us for more details.
Notes	Not Available

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Price Dependent upon Departure date, seasonality & availability.

SUSTAINABILITY

Being environmentally accountable is a crucial part of our organisation. Chimu is currently striving towards using less paper, taking several initiatives to do so and tracking our progress along the way. Our goal: A paperless organisation. For this reason, all information given to you will be sent electronically. We encourage those who choose to travel with us to support our aspirations and actions and ask that you reconsider printing out documentation. To view these documents, you can download them to your iPad or portable computer before and during your trip.

Chimu is passionate and dedicated to sustainability measures and understands the crucial part sustainability plays within the tourism industry.

We use local guides and office staff to both maximise local employment opportunities and minimise carbon footprint. Local guides also ensure you benefit from the intimate knowledge, passion and culture of the country you’re visiting. Our guides are all highly qualified (most with university degrees) or equip with many years of experience and are paid above the standard wage. Whether it be our knowledgeable local guides, locally produced meals or the transport on tour, we do not use imported goods when local products are available. We aim to minimise our impact on the environment and give as much back as possible to the communities we work in.

While visiting the many national parks, heritage sites, museums and landmarks our travellers are encouraged to explore whilst remaining culturally aware and sensitive. We further encourage you to buy appropriate souvenirs and discourage the buying of anything wrongfully made or taken from the environment i.e. shells and endangered species products. Information on how you can be environmentally conscious, and travel responsibly will be made available in our Travellers Guides and provided during your travels by guides and staff.

For more information on our sustainability policies, including how we are striving towards being a paperless organisation, click [HERE](#)

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