

MAYA CULTURE IN MEXICO

Where to experience living Maya culture and explore ancient archeological sites around modern Mexico



Maya women walking in Izamal

IZAMAL

Almost all the buildings in this tranquil town are painted in bright ochre-yellow trimmed with white. Cobblestone streets and iron lampposts give a quaint ambiance. This was once an important pilgrimage site for the Maya people. In 1561, a Franciscan convent was built over one of the Maya temples. Remains of several other ancient structures are visible around the town, including Kinich-Kakmó, a partially restored pyramid.

VALLADOLID

With its arcades and 16th-century spires, Valladolid is a colonial city with Maya flair. The imposing Church of San Servacio, a remarkable example of austere Franciscan architecture, overlooks the main plaza, and pastel-toned buildings line the bordering streets. In the markets, Maya women clad in white huipiles adorned with colorful embroidered flowers sell fresh produce, delicious local specialties and finely produced crafts.



San Servacio Cathedral, Valladolid



City center, Mérida

MÉRIDA

The capital of Yucatán state is a cultural hub replete with museums, shops and galleries. Its wide avenues lined with trees and elegant mansions are perfect for strolling. A flourishing culinary scene affords ample opportunities to sample traditional Yucatecan cuisine with its emphasis on slow-cooked pork, tangy citrus and the heat of habanero chile. It has the highest indigenous population of any city in Mexico—around 60% of the inhabitants are Maya.

SAN CRISTÓBAL DE LAS CASAS

Homes with red-tiled roofs, white stucco walls and flowery patios line the cobblestone streets of this town in the rugged mountains of Chiapas state. Lively plazas, restaurants and cafes offer entertainment and refreshment between visits to colonial churches, colorful markets, and artisan workshops. Strong Maya traditions prevail in the nearby villages of San Juan Chamula and Zinacantán, which can be visited on a day trip.



Mayan saleslady, San Cristóbal de Las Casas



Sumidero Canyon, Chiapa de Corzo

CHIAPA DE CORZO

This quiet town on the shores of the Grijalva River is the gateway to the majestic Sumidero Canyon. A lovely 16th-century Moorish-style fountain in the shape of a crown graces its main plaza. Shops and stalls around the plaza offer exquisite wood carvings, lacquerware and embroidery made by local artisans. Just outside the town is the archaeological site of an ancient Maya city, where around 200 structures have been discovered.



ANCIENT SITES

CHICHEN ITZA

The huge stepped pyramid of the Temple of Kukulcan dominates this ancient city. Vivid stone carvings survive on several structures including the Temple of the Warriors and the Wall of Skulls.

UXMAL

The Pyramid of the Magician presides over the site: its impressive height, unusual elliptical base and steep slope distinguish it from other Maya constructions.

PALENQUE

Narrow trails weave from platforms, temples and palaces, in a dramatic rainforest setting. The Temple of the Inscriptions contains a record of the city's history in Maya script and houses the tomb of ruler Lord Pakal.

CALAKMUL

Massive pyramids lie deep within the tropical forest in Campeche state. Partially excavated structures are surrounded by a network of canals and reservoirs.