

# MEXICO'S MYTHICAL PAST

## **DAY 1 DEPART FROM LONDON TO MEXICO CITY.**

Today we take our scheduled flight to Mexico City. Upon our arrival, our English-speaking guide will meet us at the airport and accompany us to our centrally located hotel in Mexico City. Welcome dinner at the hotel and briefing.

## **DAY 2 MEXICO CITY AND TEOTIHUACAN**

Today after breakfast we will explore the section of Mexico City known as the Zocalo, which is the historic center and is dominated by the Plaza de la Constitucion, the third largest square in the world. Our morning commences with a visit to the Templo Mayor, sight of the great Aztec temple that stood at the heart of Tenochtitlan. The visit will include a tour of the Excavations and the Museum. We continue with a visit to the Cathedral Metropolitana, the biggest church in Latin America, and the heart of the world's largest Catholic diocese. In the afternoon we commence with a brief visit to the Palacio Nacional, which is highlighted by the great mural by Diego Rivera painted above its main staircase and along two walls of the courtyard. This spectacular mural, painted between 1929 and 1935 in the aftermath of the Revolution, illustrates Rivera's view of the history of Mexico. In the afternoon we conclude in the nearby section of the city known as the Alameda Central, named after the popular trees found in the area, where we will visit the Museo Mural Diego Rivera, a small two-story gallery built around one of Rivera's masterpieces, the mural Dream of a Sunday Afternoon in the Alameda Central. Continue to Teotihuacán, one of most impressive cities of the ancient world, which was founded before the Christian era, and once housed up to 125,000 people. Finally we will enjoy a guided tour of the Ancient Remains including: the Avenue of the Dead, The Temple of Quetzalcoatl, the Pyramid of the Sun, the Palace of Tepantitla, the Quetzalpapalotl Palace Complex, the Pyramid of the Moon and the Museum. Return to Mexico City and dinner at a local restaurant.

## **DAY 3 CUERNAVACA & TAXCO**

Today we will explore Cuernavaca, one of the oldest cities in Mexico, which has been inhabited since 1200 BC. We begin the day with a visit to the Palacio de Cortes, built by the Spanish on the site of the Aztec pyramids they destroyed. Originally the residence of the conquistador Cortes, today the palace houses a series of murals by Diego Rivera, which depict Mexico's history from the Conquest to the Revolution, as well as artifacts from the region, we then continue with a visit to the fortress-like Cathedral de la Asuncion, dating from the 1520s, and housing Murals that indicate a far eastern influence. The afternoon will conclude with a visit to the Taller Siqueiros, which is dedicated to the work of this great Mexican muralist. In the evening we continue to Taxco, a city known for its silver jewellery and some of Mexico's finest masks. Upon our arrival, we will visit Santa Prisca y San Sebastian Church, one of Mexico's most impressive baroque churches, featuring an ultra-carved façade. The remainder of the evening can be spent in the Mercado Central, which meanders deep inside the mountain, and features a collection of wholesale silver shops and numerous food stands. After a long day we will return to Mexico City for an overnight stay and dinner.

#### **DAY 4 MEXICO CITY – VERACRUZ**

Today we will make an early departure to Veracruz, Cortez's headquarters after the Spanish Conquest. Visit El Castillo de San Juan de Ulua and the city's renowned aquarium during your guided tour of the city, overnight in Veracruz and after dinner we will take a walking tour of El Malecon.

#### **DAY 5 VERACRUZ – VILLAHERMOSA**

Today we will travel to Villahermosa and upon arrival visit the Parque Museo La Venta, a park and museum, which includes a lovely lake, a zoo, and a natural history museum. During our visit we will walk along a trail, which leads from one sculpture to the next. Most of the pieces are massive heads or altars, which can weigh as much as 40 tons. The faces seem to be half adult, half infant, and have highly stylized mouths with thick fleshy lips that turn down. Known as the "jaguar mouth," this is a principal characteristic of Olmec art. The pieces in the park were taken from La Venta, a major city during the Pre-Classic period. An exhibition area at the entrance to the park does a good job of illustrating how La Venta was laid out and what archaeologists think the Olmec were like. The Olmec created the first civilization in Mexico and developed several cultural traits that later spread to all subsequent civilizations throughout Mesoamerica. Tonight we will overnight in Villahermosa and have dinner at the hotel.

#### **DAY 6 VILLAHERMOSA – PALENQUE – CAMPECHE**

Breakfast; Today's journey takes us to Parque Nacional de Palenque, where we will enjoy a guided tour of the Ruins. Pottery shards found during the excavations show that people lived in this area as early as 300 BC, and by the Classic period, Palenque was an important ceremonial center. Of all Mexico's ruins, this is the most haunting, because of its majesty; its history and its mysterious setting. Highlights of our visit will include: the Temple of the Inscriptions, named for the great stone hieroglyphic panels found inside; Temple 13, whose remains are still being studied, but some of the artifacts are on display in the museum; the Palace, with its unique tower; the Temple of the Sun, the Temple of the Foliated Cross, the Temple of the Cross, and Temple 14, a group of temples, now cleared and in various stages of reconstruction; and the North Group, which includes the Ball Court and the Temple of the Count. Our day concludes with a brief visit to the Museum, with well-chosen and artistically displayed exhibits, including the jade contents of recently excavated tombs. Then we will visit the Agual Azul waterfalls and take a refreshing swim. Continue to Campeche on the Gulf of Mexico. Check into the hotel, dinner and overnight.

#### **DAY 7 CAMPECHE – UXMAL – KABAH – MERIDA**

Today we will take a short visit of the city of Campeche, visit the San Miguel Fort that protected the city from the pirates, then continue to the Mayan ruin site of Uxmal. The visit will include: the remarkable Pyramid of the Magician, which is unique because of its rounded sides, height, and steepness, and the doorway with heavy ornamentation. The Governor's Palace is an imposing three-level edifice with a long mosaic facade done in the Puuc style. This afternoon we will visit the Mayan site of Kabah, where we will view the spectacular facade of masks on the Palace of Masks, named for its decorative motif. Also we will get the chance to view the Palace Group, with a fine Puuc-style colonnaded facade and seven doors, two divided by columns, a common feature of Puuc architecture; the Great Temple; and a Great Arch, which was much wider at one time and may have been a monumental gate into the city. Finally we continue to Merida, upon our arrival, check in a tour hotel and dinner.

## **DAY 8            MERIDA – CHICHEN ITZA – CENOTE IKKIL**

Breakfast; Today we will explore the ruins at Chichén Itzá, which has two parts: the northern zone, which shows distinct Toltec influence, and the southern zone, with mostly Puuc architecture. Our visit will include: the El Castillo Pyramid, built with the Maya calendar in mind, as the four stairways leading up to the central platform each have 91 steps, making a total of 364, which when you add the central platform equals the 365 days of the solar year; the Main Ball Court, the largest and best preserved anywhere, with Carvings of scenes showing Maya figures dressed as ball players and decked out in heavy protective padding; the North Temple, with sculptured pillars, as well as badly ruined murals; the Temple of Jaguars, a small temple with serpent columns and carved panels showing warriors and jaguars; the Temple of the Skulls, an obvious borrowing from the post-Classic cities of central Mexico; the Platform of the Eagle, a small platform with reliefs showing eagles and jaguars clutching human hearts in their talons and claws, as well as a human head emerging from the mouth of a serpent; the Platform of Venus, also called the tomb of Chaac-Mool because a Chaac-Mool figure was discovered "buried" within the structure; the Sacred Cenote, the great natural well that may have given Chichén Itzá its name, which was used for ceremonial purposes; the Temple of the Warriors, named for the carvings of warriors marching along its walls, also called the Group of the Thousand Columns for the rows of broken pillars that flank it; the Tomb of the High Priest; the Observatory, a complex building with a circular tower, whose modifications reflected the Maya's careful observation of celestial movements and their need for increasingly exact measurements; and the Temple of Panels, the ruins of a steam bath named for the carved panels on top. We return to our hotel in Merida for the evening and dinner at a local restaurant for Yucatecan cuisine.

## **DAY 9            MERIDA CITY TOUR**

Today we will take a relaxing walking tour of the City, Mérida was founded in 1542 by the Spanish Conquistadors on top an ancient Mayan city called Ti-Ho Merida is usually called the White City due to its typical dresses "Huipiles" and because most of the building are painted in white to reflect the sun. Visit the Cathedral, the Governors Palace and the Art Room, then stroll down the Paseo de Montejo Blvd on a horse carriage ride, and admire the magnificent mansions from last century. In the afternoon we will free to explore the city to do your last shopping. Farewell dinner at a local restaurant.

## **DAY 10 / 11    MERIDA – LONDON**

Breakfast at the hotel; at schedule time, transfer to the airport for your flight to Mexico City and connect on the flight to London, which arrives the next day.