

TOP 7 AZTEC AND MAYAN RUINS IN MEXICO



Notorious for its gorgeous beaches, Mexico has full-fledged resorts that attract a large proportion of tourists who want to spend time relaxing and having fun in the country. Moreover, it is a country full of history, art, and culture - no wonder that there are 10 Mexican cities considered World Heritage Sites. Most visitors come to explore the Aztec and Mayan ruins in Mexico. Tourism Review presents the must-see ruins for any traveler in the region.

Chichen Itza

Chichen Itza is considered the most famous set of ruins in Mexico. Located in the Yucatan peninsula, the ancient city is the remain of a large and diverse population, reputed for its architecture and varied techniques. It is considered one of the best examples of the Maya-Toltec civilization in the region. According to records and research, the city was founded and established by the Mayan people in the mid-400s. Half a century later, it was conquered by the Toltecs, who established new buildings.

The city is believed to have collapsed in around 1440 BC and was abandoned in the jungle for 500 years. However, modern excavations have found the ruins of Chichen Itza in good condition, providing visitors with a great view.

The most famous building is the Temple of Kukulcán, an imposing pyramid with steps in the center. The best option is to find accommodation in the area and the easiest way to get there is to take excursions from Cancún or Mérida.

Teotihuacan

45 km from the Zócalo, the Teotihuacan archaeological site, a World Heritage Site protected by UNESCO, is one of the most visited tourist attractions in the country. Among the main attractions are the Pyramid of the Sun, 65 meters high and the second largest in Mexico; the Pyramid of the Moon, 45 meters high; and the Calzada de Los Muertos, 4 km long and located on Teotihuacan's main avenue, where the remaining constructions of that civilization are located.

It is believed that the construction of Teotihuacan began approximately one hundred BC. At its peak, the city was one of the most populous in the Americas, with around 125 000 citizens. Its structures encompassed multistoried, apartment-like dwellings made to house the residents. Some of the discoveries from this archaeological site include obsidian tools, preserved murals, and a complex system of buildings.

Visitors can walk among the buildings, climb the Pyramid of the Sun and the Pyramid of the Moon, visit the palaces, see the preserved frescoes, and circulate among the structures. It is a tour that requires several hours for the tourist to take advantage of everything the space has to offer. Each angle is more beautiful than the other. Besides the common tour during the day, it is possible to visit Teotihuacan at night: the 'Noches Mágicas' event is recent and combines tour and light shows. Visitors can see the pyramids as they were at the time when Teotihuacan was still inhabited.

The most common ways to get to the archaeological site are bus, van, fixed-rate taxi or regular tourist bus tours. To make it easier to get around, the Archaeological Zone offers many entrance gates, each located next to a different attraction.

Tulum

In the region, the seaside ruins of the Tulum archaeological site are popular with tourists. The Mayan constructions, on the Riviera Maya, only a 10-minute drive or 30-minute walk from Tulum city, were built directly on the cliffs and against the ocean. It is believed that Tulum remained in operation until the arrival of the Spanish in the 16th century.

Tulum was an important port city, mainly in the trade of precious stones. The major attraction is the Castillo cliff, the largest and most impressive structure. The rest is filled with remnant building elements (mostly destroyed) and breathtaking views.

Besides the historical visit, the region also has beach clubs for those who like to enjoy the beach. They are a good alternative to revel in the waters, as few parts of the beaches are public. Most of the access to the sea is fenced off by hotels and private properties.

Coba

Coba was one of the first cities in Mayan history and is one of the popular ruins in Mexico. It covers over 50 kilometers of living, dense jungle and was home to over 50 000 Mayans. Archaeologists believe that Coba was one of the major assemblages of ancient ruins in Yucatán. It is possible to climb 120 steep steps to the top of the town's main pyramid, the Nohoch Mul. Brave climbers are rewarded with a 180-degree view of the jungle and Coba itself. While this is the main attraction of the old city, the rest of the site can also be explored, especially by renting bicycles to go around the area more easily.

Monte Albán

For those going to Oaxaca who want to take a quick trip through history, the pre-Columbian ruins of Monte Albán are less than 20 minutes from the city. Originally built around 500 BC, Monte Albán is said to have been the capital of the Zapotec nation, one of the first groups to prosper in the Oaxaca region. The city remained the capital for approximately 1300 years, with a population of up to 25 000 people, but was eventually abandoned due to depletion of resources.

Research suggests that Monte Albán had communication with Teotihuacan. Today, the ruins, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, are one of the most important sites in the region. They are mainly known for the various carved stone monuments. Most resemble mutilated or twisted figures, representations of citizens who were used in human sacrifice and prisoners of war. The 20-meter-thick walls indicate that the buildings housed people with great power.

Palenque

Palenque is one of the favorite sites for tourists given its proximity to the romantic jungle in Chiapas. The city reached its peak between 500 and 700 B.C. It is mainly recognized for its structural and craftsmanship creativity. More than 1.400 buildings have been discovered at the site, but only 10% have been properly explored.

The ruins are well preserved and are one of the main representations of the Mayan classical period.

It is possible to walk through the temples and palaces with large courtyards, artificial pools, and ornamental fountains. Travelers can also visit the Palenque National Park, which surrounds the archaeological site and is home to species emblematic of the region. To get there, just take a direct flight or bus from Mexico City.

Uxmal

Uxmal is another important set of ruins on the Yucatan peninsula. The 1500-year-old site is known for its depiction of Puuc buildings, considered the dominant style of architecture in the region. Unlike the stepped pyramids, the buildings have plain sides and a structure that mimics a traditional hut.

Uxmal is surprisingly intact and in excellent condition. One of the main and most popular buildings is the five-tiered Pyramid of the Magician. Due to its architectural significance, this UNESCO World Heritage Site is constantly being refurbished, but not many excavations are planned. For those in Merida, getting to Uxmal requires only a 15-minute car journey.

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