

# Campeche State



Tucked into the southwestern corner of the Yucatán Peninsula like a forgotten stepdaughter, Campeche is home to vast stretches of tangled jungle, some of the region's least visited and most imposing Maya ruins, forgotten pastoral villages, bird-choked coastal lagoons and an inspiring colonial-era capital city. It's the least touristed of the Yucatán's states, and in that lies its provincial, lost-land charm.

In the northeastern Chenes region and other remote corners, women still don *huipiles* (colorfully embroidered tunics), and Yucatec is widely spoken. The back roads of this northern region bring you to forgotten underground wonderworlds, the massive restored Edzná archaeological site and a handful of smaller, less-traveled Maya ruins. This is also the wildest corner of the peninsula, and the Reserva de la Biosfera Calakmul is Mexico's largest reserve. Here you can spot toucans, monkeys and even the occasional big jungle cat. And beyond the cacophonous roar of the howlers and hiccupping frogs rise massive Maya ruined cities such as Calakmul and Becán. Along the coast, Laguna de Términos is great for birding, and beach bums revel in the solitude on forgotten beaches.

The southern coast of Campeche was affected by an oil spill in October 2007, and boomtowns such as Ciudad del Carmen are changing the spirit (and environment) of the region. Nevertheless, the age-old grace of the *campechanos* (residents of Campeche) abides. And the walled city of Campeche, without a doubt the best-preserved colonial capital on the peninsula, remains the cultural epicenter of the region, offering a great jumping-off point for your adventure into the offbeat hinterland.

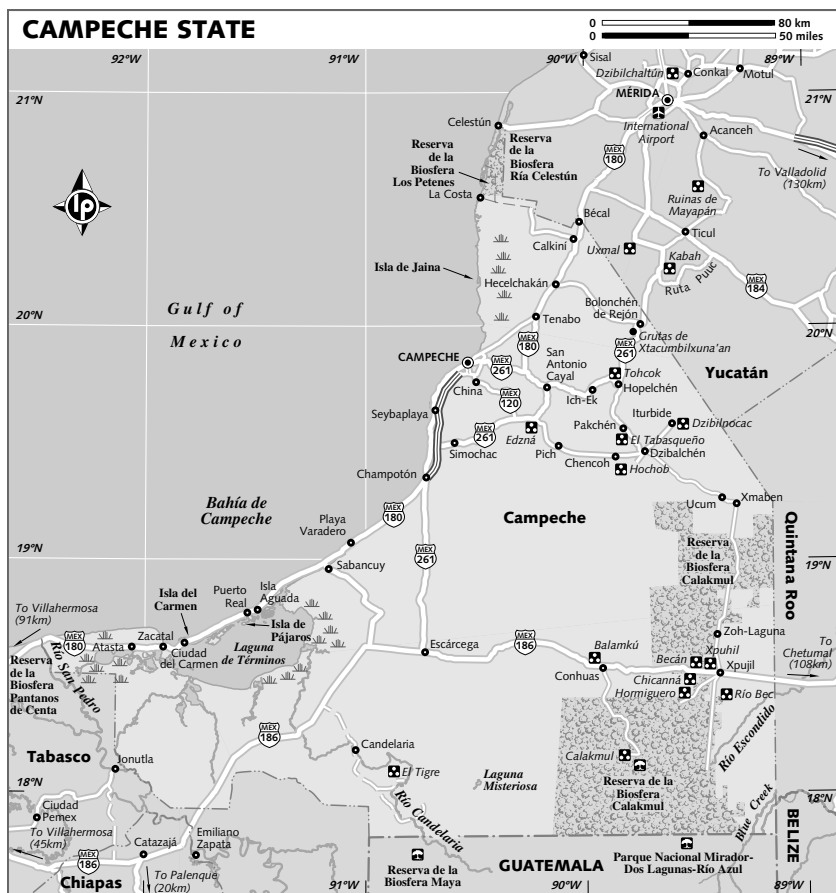
## HIGHLIGHTS

- Feel the burn as you haul yourself up the massive pyramid at **Calakmul** (p217), heavy-nosed toucans soaring past toward their treetop jungle hideaways
- Stroll through history as you cruise the colonial-era streets of **Campeche** (p199), with their pastel-hued edifices and arching ramparts
- Stop to test out your Yucatec in Maya strongholds along the old route to Mérida, visiting **Hochob** (p213) and the **Chenes sites** (p212) along the way
- Find your little patch of foggy-bottomed paradise on one of the region's lost beaches around **Playa Varadero** (p214)
- Head out for an afternoon birding mission on the **Laguna de Términos** (p214)



■ POPULATION: 754,730

■ AREA: 56,798 SQ KM



## CAMPECHE

☎ 981 / pop 210,000

Campeche is a colonial fairyland, its walled city center a tight enclave of perfectly restored pastel buildings, narrow cobblestone streets, fortified ramparts and well-preserved mansions. Added to UNESCO's list of World Heritage sites in 1999, the state capital has been so painstakingly restored you wonder if it's a real city. Nearly 2000 structures have been renovated. But leave the city's walls and you'll find a genuine Mexican provincial capital complete with a frenetic market, a quiet *malecón* (waterfront boulevard) and old fishing docks.

Relatively few tourists visit the city, meaning the town is still affordable. And the big-

hearted and proud *campechanos* are likely to show you an unobtrusive and reserved hospitality not seen in other regional capitals such as Chetumal or Mérida.

Besides the numerous mansions built by wealthy Spanish families during Campeche's heyday in the 18th and 19th centuries, two segments of the city's wall have also survived, as have no fewer than seven of the *baluartes* (bastions or bulwarks) that were built into it. Two perfectly preserved colonial forts guard the city's outskirts, one of them housing the Museo de la Arquitectura Maya, an archaeological museum with many world-class pieces.

The city's central location on the Gulf of Mexico makes it the perfect base for adventures