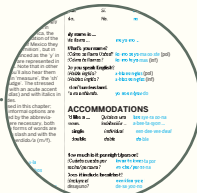


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THIS EDITION WRITTEN AND RESEARCHED BY

John Noble,

**Kate Armstrong, Ray Bartlett, Gregor Clark, John Hecht, Beth Kohn,
Tom Masters, Freda Moon, Brendan Sainsbury, Lucas Vidgen, Luke Waterson**

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YOUR PLANNING TOOL KIT

Photos, itineraries, lists and suggestions
to help you put together your perfect trip

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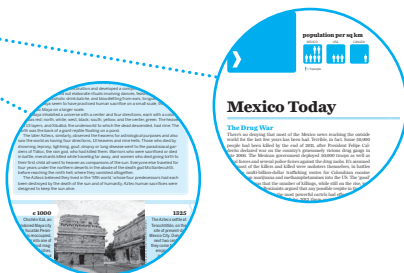
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➤ Look out for these icons:



Our author's top recommendation



A green or sustainable option



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› Mexico



Top Experiences >



Teotihuacán

The awesome Pyramids of the Sun and the Moon (p137)

Chichén Itzá

Simply spectacular ancient Maya ruins (p317)

Mexico City

Mammoth yet traditional metropolis (p56)

Tulum

Maya ruins meet Caribbean beaches (p278)

Mérida

Beautiful, cultured colonial city (p294)

Palenque

Exquisite Maya architecture in a jungle setting (p373)

Reserva Mariposa Monarca

Monarch butterflies in their millions (p610)

Oaxaca

Gorgeous handicrafts, uniquely savory cuisine (p414)

San Cristóbal de las Casas

Atmospheric colonial town (p350)



OUR STORY

A beat-up old car, a few dollars in the pocket and a sense of adventure. In 1972 that's all Tony and Maureen Wheeler needed for the trip of a lifetime – across Europe and Asia overland to Australia. It took several months, and at the end – broke but inspired – they sat at their kitchen table writing and stapling together their first travel guide, *Across Asia on the Cheap*. Within a week they'd sold 1500 copies. Lonely Planet was born.

Today, Lonely Planet has offices in Melbourne, London and Oakland, with more than 600 staff and writers. We share Tony's belief that 'a great guidebook should do three things: inform, educate and amuse'.

OUR WRITERS



John Noble

Coordinating Author, Oaxaca John has felt Mexico's pull ever since reading the unlikely story of Cortés and the Aztecs as a teenager in his native England. An early backpacking trip took him from Ciudad Juárez to Ciudad Cuauhtémoc and he has since returned for numerous extended visits. Coordinating author of every edition of this guide since 1994, John has explored almost every part of Mexico. On many editions he was joined as an author by his late wife Susan

Forsyth. John loves Mexico's art, archaeology, music, food, drinks, languages, traditions, beaches, landscapes, and most of all its charming people. He lives in Spain.



Kate Armstrong

Northern Central Highlands An Australian by birth but a Latina (she believes) in a former life, Kate visits Mexico regularly. She struck gold when asked to cover the silver cities for the third time for Lonely Planet. She cycled among cacti-strewn deserts, attended every festival possible (many – this is Mexico!), consumed kilos of *gorditas* (baked corn-dough cakes) – until she became a bit *gordita* (plump) herself – and talked and danced her way through the magic of Mexico.

At other times, she is a freelance writer, based in Australia. Kate's freelance writing adventures appear at www.katearmstrong.com.au.



Ray Bartlett

Baja California Ray first fell in love with Mexico in college, and now divides his time between a casita in Baja California Sur and a house on Cape Cod. He has written about Mexico for more than a decade, and his other Lonely Planet titles include *Japan*, *Yucatán*, *New England Trips* and *Korea*. When not traveling, he surfs, writes fiction, drinks way too much coffee and burns way too much mid-night oil. For more about Ray visit his website, www.kaisora.com.



Gregor Clark

Central Pacific Coast Gregor's love affair with Mexico began three decades ago, on a multiday bus ride from San Francisco to a summer volunteer project in Oaxaca, eating homemade *tamales* under a sky full of incomparably brilliant Sonoran Desert stars. His travels since then have focused on Mexico's Pacific coast. Favorite memories from this trip include butterfly-spotting in the Sierra Madre, releasing baby turtles into the Pacific and cooking *chiles relenos* in

Zihuatanejo. Gregor has authored more than 20 titles for Lonely Planet since 2000.

OVER MORE PAGE WRITERS

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**John Hecht**

Mexico City John's passion for Mexico began two decades ago when he moved from San Francisco to Guadalajara to study Spanish. Three years later, he said *adiós* to the mariachi capital and moved to Mexico City, where he currently resides. Working on the Mexico City chapter reminded him of everything he loves about his adopted city, from its convivial cantinas and finger-lickin' street eats to its endless cultural offerings. He has previously contributed to Lonely Planet's

Mexico and Puerto Vallarta & Pacific Mexico guidebooks.

**Beth Kohn**

Chiapas Beth has been sojourning in Mexico for almost 30 years, and this was her third whirl through Chiapas for the Mexico guide. This time around, she sloshed up muddy waterfalls, contemplated the predawn call-and-response of rowdy howler monkeys and sacrificed her feet to invisible sandflies. A thankful resident of San Francisco, she's co-authored Lonely Planet's *California, Puerto Rico* and *Yosemite, Sequoia & Kings Canyon National Parks* guides. You can see

more of her writing and photography at www.bethkohn.com.

**Tom Masters**

Western Central Highlands Tom is a travel writer based in Berlin. His first experience of Mexico was in the jungles of Chiapas filming at Palenque, which led to repeat visits and a stint of living in Mexico City. Having previously authored the *Around Mexico City* chapter for Lonely Planet, this time Tom covered the western central highlands and loved every minute of getting to know this much-underrated region. Find more of Tom's work online at www.tommasters.net.

**Freda Moon**

Around Mexico City Freda first fell in love with Mexico while sailing the Sea of Cortez with her father as a semi-amphibious three-year-old. Later, she revisited the country on a wild multimonth honeymoon with her fellow traveler and partner in adventure, Tim Stelloh. Although she's found herself sick and stranded in the deserts of Baja and stared down by *federales*, she's never grown weary of this, her favorite country. A regular contributor to the *New York Times* travel section,

Freda's work as a travel writer and journalist can be seen at www.fredamoon.com.

**Brendan Sainsbury**

Veracruz An expat Brit now living in Vancouver, Canada, Brendan first visited Mexico in the early 1990s when he foolishly cycled from Veracruz to Mexico City and – miraculously – lived to tell the tale. He has returned numerous times since to get married, to honeymoon and to initiate his two-month-old son, Kieran, to the joys of global travel. Brendan has authored more than 25 guidebooks for Lonely Planet including the current guides to Cuba, Italy, Spain, the USA and Canada.

**Lucas Vidgen**

Yucatán Peninsula Lucas first visited the Yucatán in 2002, breezing through long enough to be captivated by the lush scenery, irresistible beaches and delicious food. He now lives in Guatemala and makes it a point to pop over the border whenever he can to munch down on *pibil* and splash around in cenotes. Lucas has contributed to a variety of Lonely Planet's Latin American titles. Back home he publishes – and occasionally works on – Quetzaltenango's leading nightlife

and culture magazine, *XelaWho* (www.xelawho.com).

**Luke Waterson**

Copper Canyon & Northern Mexico Returning to Northern Mexico for this edition didn't faze Luke: after all, Juárez (fish tacos, actually) was his first Mexican experience. Why? Because he knew the shallow reporting condemning the entire north as dangerous was inaccurate, and that for those who arrive taking the media hype with a well-deserved pinch of salt, incredible experiences await. Luke has been exploring Mexico since 2004: this is his third book for Lonely Planet.

He's also a force behind relaunched UK travel magazine *Real Travel*. Peruse his travel writing at www.lukewaterson.co.uk and find him on Twitter (@lukewaterson1) ranting about Latin America, from border conflicts to Chávez and steak.

itineraries

Whether you've got six days or 60, these itineraries provide a starting point for the trip of a lifetime. Want more inspiration? Head online to lonelyplanet.com/thorntree to chat with other travelers.



Two to Three Weeks

Riviera Maya & Costa Maya Getaway

Once you're over the beach and nightclubs of **Cancún**, slip across to more relaxed **Isla Mujeres** for some good snorkeling or diving. If you brought kids along, spend a day at one of the mainland 'eco-parks' such as **Selvática** with its 12 zip-lines. South along the Caribbean coast, spend some days at **Tulum**, which has one of Mexico's most perfect beaches and most spectacularly sited Maya ruins. Within day-trip reach are the jungle-surrounded Maya pyramids and temples of **Cobá** and the wild **Reserva de la Biosfera Sian Ka'an**. South of Tulum the coast takes the name Costa Maya – far less developed and touristed than the 'Riviera Maya' to the north. **Mahahual** remains a laid-back Caribbean village despite cruise-ship visits, with marvelous snorkeling and diving at the offshore coral atoll **Banco Chinchorro**. To really escape, head on to the tiny fishing town of **Xcalak**, another excellent diving and snorkeling base. Returning northward, wind up your trip with a stop at chic **Playa del Carmen**, a great base for superlative diving and snorkeling on **Isla Cozumel** and cenote (limestone sinkhole) diving or swimming at **Cristalino Cenote**.



Two to Four Weeks

Colonial Towns & Cities of Mexico's Heartland

The nation's capital is ringed by a necklace of colonial cities that are blessed with gorgeous architecture of carved stone and colorful tiles, broad plazas, splashing fountains and lively, modern cultural scenes – Mexico's historic, architectural and artistic gems. To do justice to all these cities would easily occupy a month and might result in travel (and monument) fatigue, but you can get a very good taste of the region by selecting about five destinations for a shorter tour.

Mexico City itself has a large concentration of grand colonial architecture, starting with its central plaza, the *Zócalo*, and the cathedral and National Palace that flank it. The colonial center is interestingly spiced with plenty of more modern, and a bit of pre-Hispanic, architecture and art.

Head east for **Puebla**, which has the country's greatest concentration of restored colonial churches and mansions – many of the latter now housing interesting museums – and is still one of the most Spanish-influenced cities in Mexico. Southward, charming hillside **Taxco** harbors many silver workshops and other surprises in its lovely cobblestone alleyways.

Go west to Michoacán's lively capital **Morelia**, home to an imposing cathedral and many well-preserved buildings. **Pátzcuaro** is a handsome, low-rise, highland town where the indigenous Purépecha sell their wares around one of Mexico's loveliest central plazas. Further west, *muy mexicano* **Guadalajara**, Mexico's second-largest city, is perhaps less quaint than its neighbors but retains beautiful plazas and plenty of fine colonial architecture, not to mention fabulous shopping and nightlife.

To the north, trip up to prosperous **Zacatecas**, a stylish silver city with a stupendous baroque cathedral. Heading back toward Mexico City you reach El Bajío, the region famed as the Cuna de la Independencia (Cradle of Independence) for its vital role in the early-19th-century independence movement that put an end to Mexico's colonial era. Here, lively **Guanajuato** awaits in a ravine awash with quixotic *callejones* (alleys), a vibrant student life and historical reminders galore, while the festive and charming expat capital **San Miguel de Allende** is full of beautifully restored colonial buildings, including many homes. Before you hit Mexico City again, don't neglect handsome **Querétaro**, which has several fine museums and a very walkable historic center.



- » (above) The legendary waves at Puerto Escondido's Playa Zicatela (p448)
- » (left) The cobblestone streets of colonial San Cristóbal de las Casas (p350)



Six Weeks

Beaches, Cities & Temples of Mexico's South

This classic journey leads travelers south from Mexico's central heartland to its glorious Caribbean beaches, and gives as good a sampling of the country's highlights as you can get in a few weeks. Start by exploring **Mexico City**, a fascinating megapolopolis that is key to any understanding of Mexico, the country. Take a side trip to **Teotihuacán**, capital of ancient Mexico's biggest empire, with its awesome pyramids. Then head east to colonial **Puebla** and the fun-loving, tropical port city of **Veracruz**, before crossing the mountains southward to **Oaxaca**. This lovely colonial city, with Mexico's finest handicrafts, sits at the heart of a beautiful region with a large indigenous population. Don't miss the ancient Zapotec capital, **Monte Albán**, just outside the city.

Cross the Sierra Madre del Sur to one of the sun-baked beach spots on the Oaxaca coast, such as **Puerto Escondido**, **Mazunte** or **Zipolite**. Continue east to **San Cristóbal de las Casas**, a beautiful, cool, highland town surrounded by intriguing indigenous villages. Move on through Chiapas to **Palenque**, perhaps the most stunning of all Maya cities, with its backdrop of emerald-green jungle, and **Yaxchilán**, another marvelous Maya city accessible only by river, echoing with the growls of howler monkeys deep in the Lacandón Jungle.

Head northeast to the Yucatán Peninsula, with a first stop at **Campeche**, an attractive mix of painstakingly restored colonial city and bustling modern town, and a side trip to the nearby Maya site of **Edzná**. Move on to colonial **Mérida**, the Yucatán's lively cultural capital and the base for visiting the superb Maya ruins of **Uxmal** and the **Ruta Puuc**. Next stop is **Chichén Itzá**, the Yucatán's most celebrated ancient Maya site. From here, head directly to **Tulum** on the Caribbean coast, a Maya site with a glorious beach nearby. Now make your way northward along the Riviera Maya to the hip beach town of **Playa del Carmen**, with a side trip to **Isla Cozumel** for world-class snorkeling and diving, before reaching Mexico's most popular and most unabashed coastal resort, **Cancún**. For final relaxation, head out to **Isla Mujeres** or low-key **Isla Holbox**. At Holbox, if it's between mid-May and mid-September, you can take a swim with some giant (and harmless) whale sharks.



Three Weeks Baja Road Trip

Over 1700km along the Carretera Transpeninsular (Hwy 1) from Tijuana to Los Cabos is a classic Mexican road trip, traversing deserts, beautiful remote coastlines and half a dozen all-different cities.

Get a feel for the border buzz of **Tijuana**, then savor the surf and wines of **Ensenada** before moving further south to watch the whales on **Laguna Ojo de Liebre** (January to March). Cross the Desierto de Vizcaíno to the leafy oasis of **San Ignacio**, and check out the ancient rock art of the **Sierra de San Francisco**. Follow this with some diving or kayaking in the Sea of Cortez off **Mulegé** or **Loreto**.

Further south, cosmopolitan **La Paz** provides access to brilliant beaches and the superb marine life of **La Ventana**. Try snorkeling or diving the coral reef off uncrowded **Cabo Pulmo** before landing at the foot of the peninsula and sampling tranquil **San José del Cabo** and the party scene of **Cabo San Lucas**. Slip away to artsy **Todos Santos** for a change of pace and some of Baja California's best surf.

Four Weeks Pacific Dreams

Mexico's Pacific coast is a glittering sequence of pristine jungle-lined beaches, super surf, busy resorts and every grade of coastal dream in between.

Sip margaritas on the lively plaza in **Mazatlán**, a beach town with an artsy historic core, before visiting the ancient island of **Mexcaltitán** and the surf and wildlife-rich lagoons of laid-back **San Blas**. Then it's on to clubs, gourmet food, whale-watching and shopping in **Puerto Vallarta**.

Isolated beaches abound on the Costalegre, home to some luxurious resorts: spend a day (or more) on the beaches of palm-fringed **Bahía Tenacatita**. Moving on, don't miss the street tacos in **San Patricio-Melaque**. Hang out at tranquil **Playa Maruata**, the most beautiful beach in Michoacán, or rent a *cabaña* (cabin) at the quaint surfer haven of **Barra de Nexpa**. Surf, snorkel or take to horseback at **Troncones** before hiring a kayak at charming **Zihuatanejo**.

See the cliff divers and learn a little Mexican history in **Acapulco** before moving on to relaxed **Puerto Escondido**, with its A-grade surf and a lively little after-dark scene. To end your trip, lie back in a hammock at the low-budget paradise beaches of **Mazunte** or **Zipolite**.

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