



Veracruz

Includes »

Veracruz City.....	195
Xalapa.....	208
Córdoba.....	218
Fortín de las Flores.....	220
Coscomatepec.....	222
Orizaba.....	223
Tuxpan.....	226
Papantla.....	228
El Tajín.....	231
Tlacotalpan.....	236
Santiago Tuxtla.....	237
San Andrés Tuxtla.....	239
Catemaco.....	240
Reserva de la Biosfera Los Tuxtlas.....	243

Best Places to Eat

- » Gran Café de La Parroquia (p203)
- » Las Delicias Marinas (p208)
- » Plaza Pardo (p230)
- » La Fonda (p212)

Best Places to Stay

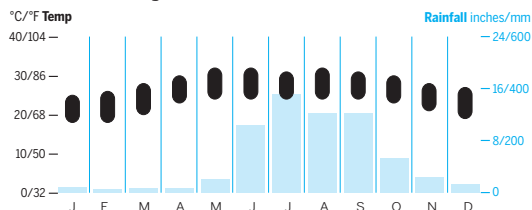
- » Posada del Emperador (p222)
- » Hotel Imperial (p201)
- » Posada del Cafeto (p211)
- » Casa Real del Café (p215)

Why Go?

Imagine a mini-version of Machu Picchu but without the tourists, a ballroom dance with a sexy Afro-Cuban twist, a mountain as fickle and majestic as Kilimanjaro and the world's first (unaccredited) bungee-jumpers. Unusual epiphanies are the norm on Mexico's central Gulf coast, a snapshot of a nation with its guard down where the runaway juggernaut called 'global homogenization' gets stopped in its tracks by a staunch population of culturally proud *jarochos* who have embellished their downtowns with pretty plazas rather than ugly shopping malls. Despite being only two flying hours out of Houston, Texas, Veracruz is serially overlooked by visitors from the English-speaking north who jet over it on their way to spring breaks in Cancún or Cozumel. As a result, nothing ever feels 'staged' here, allowing you to dive unmolested into a 3000-year-old culture, dodge beach crowds and argue about conflicting *mole* (a type of chili sauce) recipes with opinionated waiters in Spanish.

When to Go

Veracruz City



Oct Cheap prices, bearable temperatures and barely another tourist in sight.

Feb–Mar The Veracruz Carnival kicks off the biggest party on Mexico's eastern coast.

Nov–Feb Peak tourist season for non-Mexicans with less rain and balmy temperatures.

History

The Olmecs, Mesoamerica's earliest known civilization, built their first great center around 1200 BC at San Lorenzo in southern Veracruz state. In 900 BC the city was violently destroyed, but Olmec culture lingered for several centuries at Tres Zapotes. During the Classic period (AD 250–900) the Gulf coast developed another distinctive culture, known as the Classic Veracruz civilization. Its most important center was El Tajín, which was at its peak between AD 600 and 900. In the post-Classic period the Totonacs established themselves in the region south of Tuxpan. North of Tuxpan, the Huastec civilization flourished from 800 to 1200. During this time, the warlike Toltecs also moved into the Gulf coast area. In the mid-15th century, the Aztecs overtook most of the Totonac and Huastec areas, exacting tributes of goods and sacrificial victims and subduing revolts.

When Hernán Cortés arrived in April 1519, he made Zempoala's Totonacs his first allies against the Aztecs by vowing to protect them against reprisals. Cortés set up his first settlement, Villa Rica de la Vera Cruz (Rich Town of the True Cross), and by 1523 all the Gulf coast was in Spanish hands. Forced slavery, newly introduced diseases and the ravages of war severely reduced indigenous populations.

Veracruz harbor became an essential trade and communications link with Spain and was vital for anyone trying to rule Mexico, but the climate, tropical diseases and pirate threats inhibited the growth of Spanish settlements.

Under dictator Porfirio Díaz, Mexico's first railway linked Veracruz to Mexico City in 1872, stimulating industrial development. In 1901 oil was discovered in the Tampico area, and by the 1920s the region was producing a quarter of the world's oil. In the 1980s the Gulf coast still held well over half of Mexico's reserves and refining capacity. Today, the region is not as large a player as it used to be, but is still a significant contributor to Mexico's oil economy.

Dangers & Annoyances

Mexico's infamous drug war migrated to Veracruz in early 2011 with nasty gang wars firing off in Veracruz City, Boca del Río and Xalapa. Yet, despite some understandably bad press, Veracruz – if you're not a journalist or a member of a drug cartel – is still relatively safe. At the time of writing no

foreign tourists and few innocent Mexican bystanders had been directly affected by the violence.

Travelers should remain wary of petty theft in cheap hotel rooms and pickpocketing in crowded market areas, especially in big cities. Hurricanes threaten between June and November. Check out the [US National Hurricane Center website](http://www.nhc.noaa.gov) (www.nhc.noaa.gov) for the latest. Mosquitoes in coastal regions carry dengue fever, especially in central and southeastern Veracruz.

Veracruz City

☑229 / POP 430,000

Veracruz, like all great port cities, is an unholy mélange of grime, romance and melted-down cultures. Conceived in 1519, this is Mexico's oldest European-founded settlement, but, usurped by subsequent inland cities, it's neither its most historic, nor most visually striking. Countless sackings by the French, Spanish and Americans have siphoned off the prettiest buildings, leaving a motley patchwork of working docks and questionable hybrid architecture punctuated by the odd stray colonial masterpiece. But Veracruz's beauty is in its grit rather than its grandiosity. A carefree spirit reigns in the *zócalo* (main square) most evenings where the primary preoccupation is who to cajole into a *danzón* (traditional couples dance). Well known for their warmth and animation, *jarocho*s (people from Veracruz City and surrounding low-lying coastal areas) are lovers not fighters, a fact reflected in their musical dexterity which has a notable Afro-Cuban influence. Fear not: there are kid-friendly aquariums and interesting museums here, but Veracruz's best 'sights' are the less obvious things: its energetic plazas, its cafes full of chin-wagging locals and the unscripted encounters that await in its wild urban pastiche.

History

Hernán Cortés arrived at the site of present-day Veracruz on Good Friday April 21, 1519, and thus began his siege of Mexico. By 1521 he had crushed the Aztec empire.

Veracruz provided Mexico's main gateway to the outside world for 400 years. Invaders and pirates, incoming and outgoing rulers, settlers, silver and slaves – all came and went, making Veracruz a linchpin in Mexico's history. In 1569 English sailor Francis Drake survived a massive Spanish sea attack