

# Welcome to Mexico

*Jungles, deserts; teeming cities, one-street pueblos; fiesta fireworks, Frida's angst: Mexico conjures up so many vivid images. And the reality lives up to the expectation.*

## An Outdoor Life

From the southern jungles to the smoking, snowcapped volcanoes and the cactus-dotted northern deserts, all surrounded by 10,000km of coast strung with sandy beaches and wildlife-rich lagoons, Mexico is an endless adventure for the senses. A climate that ranges from temperate to hot almost everywhere makes for a life spent largely in the open air. Take it easy lying on a beach, dining alfresco or strolling pretty streets, or get out and snorkel warm Caribbean reefs, hike mountain cloud forests or take a boat in search of dolphins or whales.

## Art & Soul of a Nation

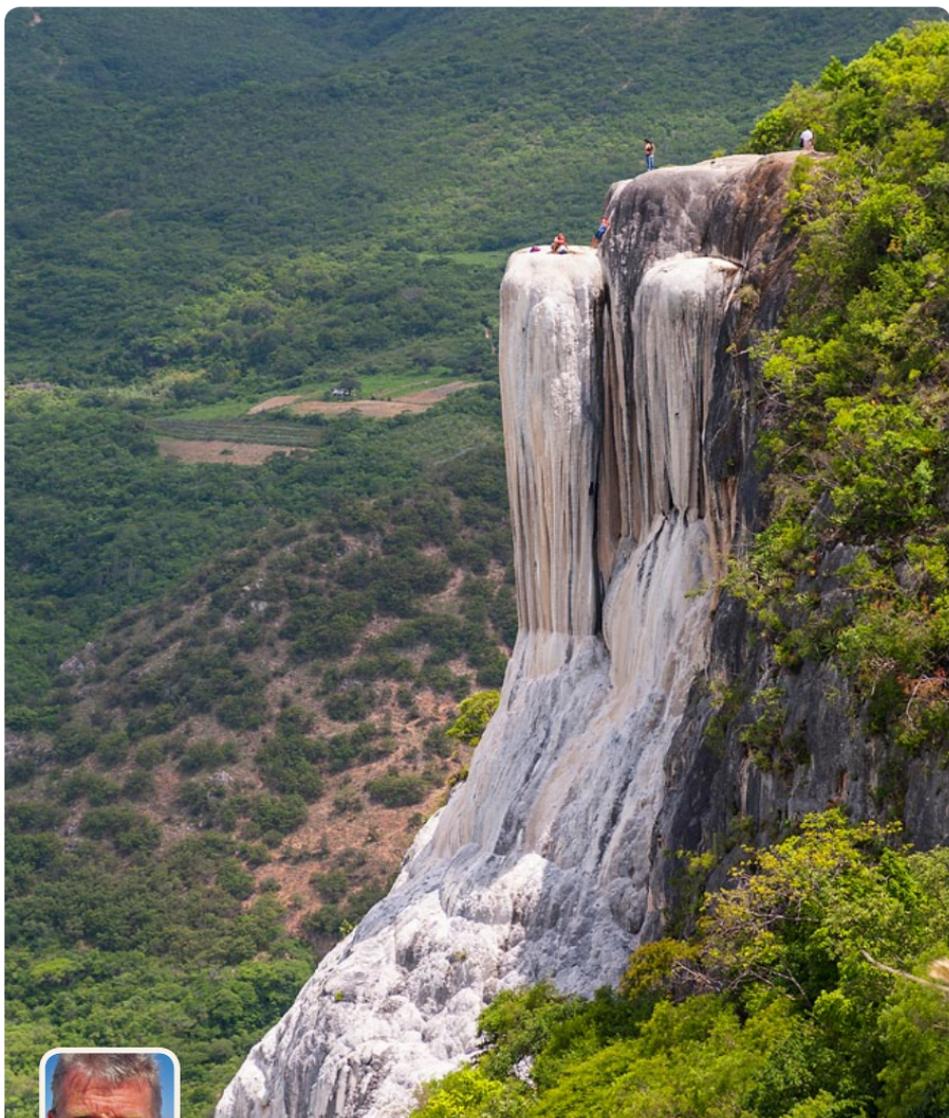
Mexico is packed with culture and history. Its pre-Hispanic civilizations built some of the world's great archaeological monuments, while the Spanish colonial era left beautiful towns full of tree-shaded plazas and richly sculpted stone churches and mansions. Modern Mexico has seen a surge of great art from the likes of Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo. Top-class museums and galleries around the country document Mexico's fascinating history and its endless creative verve. Popular culture is just as vibrant, from the underground dance clubs of Mexico City to the wonderful handicrafts of the indigenous population.

## Travel for All

Travel in Mexico is what you make it and the country caters to all types of visitor. Stay in pampering resorts, budget beach huts or colonial mansions. Eat cutting-edge fusion food in chic gourmet restaurants or grandmothers' recipes at a busy market *comedor* (food stall). Getting from A to B is easy thanks to comfortable buses that run almost anywhere and an extensive domestic flight network. Or try renting a car: Mexico has some excellent roads, and outside the cities traffic is mostly light.

## Los Mexicanos

At the heart of your Mexican experience will be the Mexican people. A super-diverse crew from city hipsters to shy indigenous villagers, they're justly renowned for their love of color and frequent fiestas but are also philosophical folk, to whom timetables are less important than *simpatía* (empathy). You will rarely find Mexicans less than courteous; they're often positively charming, and they know how to please their guests. They're fiercely proud of Mexico, their one-of-a-kind homeland with its tight-knit family networks, beautiful-ugly cities, deep-rooted traditions, unique agave-based liquors and sensationally tasty, chili-laden food. It doesn't take long to understand why.



## Why I Love Mexico

By John Noble, Author

I first felt Mexico's pull when reading, as a teenager, the barely credible story of Cortés and the Aztecs. My first visit was three months backpacking from the US border to the Guatemalan border, and I found a kind of spiritual home in the green highlands of Chiapas. Since then I've wandered over most parts of Mexico on 12 extended trips, and come to love its deserts, coasts, jungles and volcanoes too – and its endless variety of tasty foods, the spectacular evidence of its ancient civilizations, its inspired art and handicrafts, and, most of all, its charming, hospitable people.

**For more about our authors, see page 896**