

# Welcome to Mexico

*Palm-fringed beaches, chili-spiced cuisine; steamy jungles, teeming cities; fiesta fireworks, Frida's angst: Mexico conjures up diverse, vivid dreams. And the reality lives up to the imagining.*

## An Outdoor Life

With steaming jungles, smoking, snow-capped volcanoes, cactus-strewn deserts and 10,000km of coast strung with sandy beaches and wildlife-rich lagoons, Mexico is an endless adventure for the senses and a place where life is lived largely in the open air. Take it easy dining al fresco beside a Pacific beach or strolling Guanaquato's colonial streets. Or get out and hike Oaxaca's mountain cloud forests or snorkel warm Caribbean reefs.

## Art & Soul of a Nation

Mexico's pre-Hispanic civilizations built some of the world's great archaeological monuments, including Teotihuacán's towering pyramids and the exquisite Maya temples of Palenque. The Spanish colonial era left beautiful towns full of tree-shaded plazas and richly sculpted stone churches and mansions, while modern Mexico has seen a surge of great art from the likes of Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo. Top-class museums and galleries document the country's fascinating history and its endless creative verve. Popular culture is just as vibrant, from the underground dance clubs and street art 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 on the Riviera Maya, budget beach huts on the Pacific or colonial mansions in the highlands. Eat gourmet fusion food in chic city restaurants or equally delicious grandmothers' recipes at a busy market *comedor* (food stall). Getting from A to B is easy with comfortable buses running almost everywhere and an extensive domestic flight network.

## Los Mexicanos

At the heart of your Mexican experience will be the Mexican people. A super-diverse crew, from Mexico City hipsters to the shy indigenous villagers of Chiapas, they're renowned for their love of color and frequent fiestas, but they're also philosophical folk, to whom timetables are less important than *simpatía* (empathy). You'll rarely find Mexicans less than courteous. They're more often positively charming, and know how to please guests. They might despair of ever being well governed, but they're fiercely proud of Mexico, their one-of-a-kind homeland with all its variety, tight-knit family networks, beautiful-ugly cities, deep-rooted traditions, unique agave-based liquors and sensationally tasty, chili-laden food.



## Why I Love Mexico

By John Noble, Writer

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 Ciudad Juárez to Ciudad Cuauhtémoc, and I found a kind of spiritual home in the misty, mysterious highlands of Chiapas. Since then I've wandered over most parts of Mexico on many trips and come to love its coasts, jungles, volcanoes and cities – and its superbly tasty food, spectacular ancient civilizations, inspired art and handicrafts and, most of all, its charming, hospitable, so very real people.

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