JOURNEY
LATIN AMERICA



PRIVATE JOURNEYS WITH JOURNEY LATIN

SELF-DRIVE MEXICO: HIGHLIGHTS OF THE YUCATAN

10 days from **£2,250pp**

MEXICO / CARIBBEAN COAST: RIVIERA MAYA AND HOLBOX / MÉRIDA, CHICHÉN ITZÁ AND THE YUCATAN



WHY US

We are the UK's No.1 specialist in travel to Latin America and have been creating award-winning holidays to every corner of the region for over four decades; we pride ourselves on being the most knowledgeable people there are when it comes to travel to Central and South America and passionate about it too.

OUR JOURNEY

As our name suggests, we are single-minded about Latin America. This is what sets us apart from other travel companies – and what allows us to offer you not just a holiday but the opportunity to experience something extraordinary on inspiring journeys throughout Mexico, Central and South America.

WE LOVE LATIN AMERICA

- A passion for the region runs through all we do
- All our Consultants have lived or travelled extensively in Latin America
- Up-to-the-minute knowledge underpinned by 40 years' experience

TRAVEL WITH CONFIDENCE

- Fully bonded and licensed
- ATOL-protected
- On your side when it matters
- Book with confidence, knowing every penny is secure

THE REAL LATIN AMERICA

- Our insider knowledge helps you go beyond the guidebooks
- We hand-pick hotels with character and the most rewarding excursions
- Let us show you the Latin America we know and love

OVERVIEW & OUTLINE ITINERARY

This self-drive holiday to Mexico gives you the chance to discover the colonial cities and jungle-shrouded Mayan pyramids of the Yucatan Peninsula, as well as the idyllic island of Holbox and Caribbean beaches of the Riviera Maya with your own car. If you'd rather not drive this holiday can be done with private transfers and guides, just ask us.

DAY 1	**Arrive in Cancún. Collect hire car and drive to your hotel**
DAY 2	**Drive to Chichén Itzá, Mayan archaeological site.**
DAY 3	**Explore Chichén Itzá.**
DAY 4	**Drive to your hacienda on the outskirts of colourful Mérida.**
DAY 5	**Optional food tour of Merida or visit Celestun**
DAY 6	**Optional visit to the Mayan site of Uxmal.**
DAY 7	**Drive to Chiquila and take a ferry to Isla Holbox.**
DAY 8	**Relax on Isla Holbox; optional swimming with whale sharks.**
DAY 9	**Day at leisure on Holbox.**
DAY 10	**Drive to Cancún airport for international flight home.**

ITINERARY

Mexico's Yucatán Peninsula and Caribbean Coast, with its Mayan ruins, pretty colonial towns, and sandy beaches, is ideal for independent exploration by self-drive hire car. Not only is it economical; it gives you the freedom to travel at your own pace, stopping whenever you want, but with the security of a pre-planned itinerary and hotel reservations. The region has a network of well-signed roads, distances between attractions are relatively short, there are service stations to fill up your car and a huge range of fantastic eateries to fuel yourselves on.

You'll set off from Cancún airport to discover the peninsula. There, you'll find vestiges of the once supreme Mayan civilisation. Sites replete with temples and pyramids festooned with sacred carvings were, once abandoned, swallowed up by a rapacious jungle but are now gradually being revealed. They're all rather Indiana Jones. You'll visit the best-known sites, Chichén Itzá and Uxmal, both easily accessible.

You will also be based near the beautiful colonial town of Mérida, a friendly place to see a different side of Mexico with street markets, restaurants of all types and lively entertainment, should you wish to do so. Alternatively, the sleepy fishing village of Celestún is just a short drive away - famous for its Biosphere Reserve and large flocks of flamingos. Finally, you will drive up to the Gulf coast and take a ferry to laid-back and peaceful Isla Holbox.

DAY 1

Arrive in Cancún. Collect hire car and drive to your hotel



On arrival at Cancún airport you will be met by a representative who will escort you to the car hire office a short distance away. The assistant will wait with you until you have checked the car and documentation. Your car will be a mid-sized Chevrolet Aveo (or similar) which will be your companion for 11 days. Other sizes of car are available, and terms and conditions are subject to change.

The adventure begins! Jump into the car and drive off to your nearby hotel, close to the beach. Cancún straddles a lagoon on the north-eastern tip of the Yucatán peninsula and is a purpose-built resort with beautiful beaches, good diving and water sports as the main attractions. If you have a bit more time you might linger on for a day or two (speak to us about lengthening your stay) and consider visiting the underwater sculpture park.

DAY 2

Drive to Chichén Itzá, Mayan archaeological site.



Drive inland to Chichén Itzá, the grandest and most well organised of all the Mayan sites, dominated by the huge, symmetrical, stepped El Castillo pyramid.

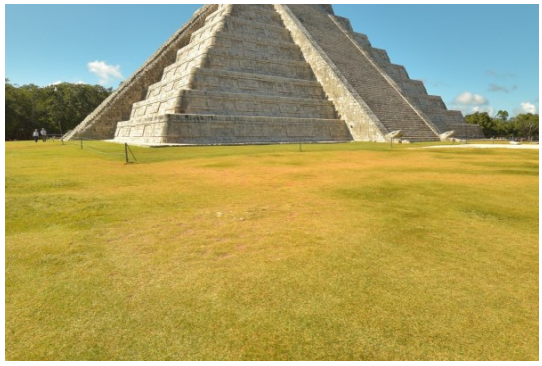
The drive from Cancún to Chichén Itzá is around 200km and will never take less than 2hrs even if travelling directly on the toll (or cuota) road. But we recommend that you take the free road (libre). You'll encounter more speed bumps but you will pass through small villages at a slower pace and get a better feel for Mexican life in the Yucatán.

En route you might want to visit the colourful, laid-back colonial town of Valladolid with its grand church and peaceful plaza. It's also a good spot from which to visit one of the cenotes which pit the peninsula. Cenotes are steep-sided freshwater sinkholes fed by underground rivers, deep enough for you to take a dip into their sparkling clear turquoise and emerald waters.

When you arrive at your accommodation you can enjoy the lovely gardens and the pool. It's just a short walk from the site, which you will explore tomorrow.

DAY 3

Explore Chichén Itzá.



This morning you will visit one of the modern seven wonders of the world, Chichén Itzá. We recommend exploring the ruins with a local guide as it will bring the history alive. Or you can choose to wander the site to discover its pyramids, macabre sculpture and temples, on your own; it's well laid out and easy to explore.

The origins of the site are mysterious. It has the largest and best-preserved ball court in the Americas: the venue for an ancient ritual game that was played throughout the continent, but which is still not fully understood. Archaeologists have not been able to determine whether the losers or winners were decapitated, but judging from the gory carvings along the base of the court's walls, someone certainly came to an unpleasant end.

DAY 4

Drive to your hacienda on the outskirts of colourful Mérida.



There is plenty of time for a second visit to Chichen Itza, exploring in the morning calm is a very different experience.

The drive to Merida on the toll road takes two hours. We recommend stopping en-route at the beautiful town of Izamal (64km east of Mérida). Known as the yellow city as all its major buildings including an impressive Franciscan monastery are painted a deep mustard. The local food market is known for its venison tacos.

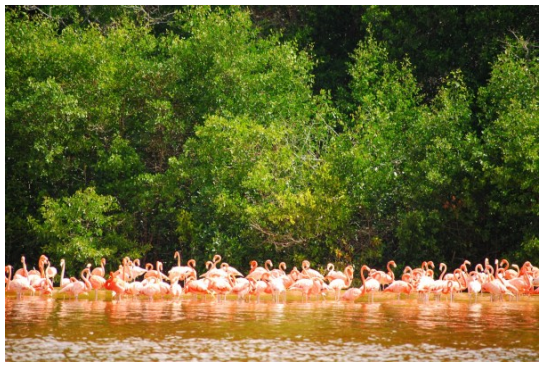
From here you continue the short distance to your hotel, an historic hacienda around 30 mins drive from Mérida, giving you the chance to relax in a peaceful environment but also making it easy to pop into the city to explore.

Mérida is the capital of the state of Yucatán. The city was founded by the Maya but in 1542 it was conquered by the Spanish conquistadores and became immensely wealthy, described as the 'Paris of the New World'. The city was culturally and geographically isolated from the rest of the country until transport infrastructure reached it in the 1950s.

Today, Mérida retains a lovely colonial centre, with a mix of opulent and crumbly buildings but it is a modern, bustling, thriving city, with lots of local character, some excellent places to eat and good shops and markets. The inhabitants, descendants of the Maya and the colonists, love a good fiesta, and you may well find one going on, with live music and street stalls, while you are there. Stroll around the sunny streets, shop for local lace or one of the region's famous hammocks, or simply enjoy the relaxing grounds of your out-of-town hacienda.

DAY 5

Optional food tour of Merida or visit Celestun



Today you have a free day to explore, there are plenty of options nearby to keep you entertained. You can drive into colonial Merida to explore the colourful city with its Spanish buildings, grand churches, wonderful museums and famous food scene. We can organise various city tours including one focused on the delicious street food, just ask your consultant.

If you want to see a more natural side you can drive to the coast and visit Celestun, a small fishing town set in the middle of a wildlife sanctuary studded with lagoons and fresh water springs. It's best known for its colourful congregation of flamingos, most populous between March and September, but there's a host of other waterfowl species to be spotted here including egrets, herons and sandpipers.

DAY 6

Optional visit to the Mayan site of Uxmal.



Uxmal is one of the regions most famous ruins, for many the most dramatic forest-clad Mayan site. It's just over an hours drive south of Mérida, but you enter a different world. The site is dominated by the majestic Pyramid of the Magician, inhabited by birds and bats, alongside which is an elegant 'nunnery' quadrangle with Puuc-style complex stonework pieced together like a jigsaw puzzle.

One of the joys of self-drive is the total flexibility it allows, so you can get there as early of late as you like and explore the ruins at your own pace. If you want to learn more about the site and regions history, authorised guides are available at the entrance, or we can arrange one for you.

DAY 7

Drive to Chiquila and take a ferry to Isla Holbox.



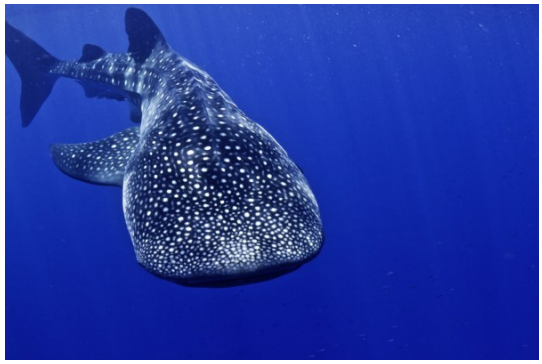
It's back in the car today to drive north to the coast. Isla Holbox is separated from the Mexican mainland on the tip of the Yucatán peninsula by a shallow blue lagoon which attracts migrating flamingos. With virtually no vehicles permitted on the island, the streets in the lazy village are made of sand, and you get around in golf buggies. There's an uninterrupted stretch of powder white beach on which to sunbathe, and there is scope for other activities:

You leave your car at a secure parking area (pay locally) at Chiquila, the ferry port on the mainland side, and then take a 15 minute ferry ride to the island. Golf carts are available there to carry you to your hotel for a few dollars.

There are several options you could take to get to Chiquila. You may be able to do the journey in a little under three hours if using the main roads primarily. Alternatively you could take the bumpier highway 176 from Merida heading east towards the Tizimin junction at which point you can visit the spectacular ruins at Ek Balam or head to the coast to see flocks of flamingos at Rio Lagartos. If taking this route check the last ferry to Isla Holbox and make sure you don't miss it!

DAY 8

Relax on Isla Holbox; optional swimming with whale sharks.



Holbox takes you back to the days before the Yucatan became a popular tourist destination, there are almost no cars on the island so you can walk the peaceful streets or simply stroll along the white sand beaches. The crystal clear sea gives you a great oppertunity to snorkel all before spending the evening discovering the small laid back restaurants and bars serving fresh sea food that line the sea front. It's the perfect place to get away from it all and relax for a few days

In season, May-Sept, the migratory path of whale sharks brings them close to the tropical waters of Holbox and Contoy islands, – this is one of a handful of places in the world they visit and where you can view them.

DAY 9

Day at leisure on Holbox.

There's lots to do on Isla Holbox. You can kayak through the mangroves; visit the flamingo-dotted Passion Island; or hire bikes and ride to the ecological reserve at Yum Balam where the beach is strewn with driftwood and iguanas cling to the trees. Or just relax on the property's sun-loungers, by the pool or on the beach. The sunsets here are some of the most colourful in the world.



DAY 10

Drive to Cancún airport for international flight home.

You will probably want to take the most direct route to get back to drop your car off in Cancún with plenty of time, so allow at least 3 hours to take the (regular) ferry, collect your car from Chiquila and head south via Kantunilkin to the toll road back to Cancún airport.

INCLUDED EXCURSIONS

- None included - enquire for more information

ESSENTIALS

TRANSPORT
Self-drive car, Chevrolet Aveo or similar with air-conditioning.

TRIP SUITABILITY
We have chosen properties convenient for exploring the cultural attractions in the area. They are all mid-range but vary in style from historic conversions to resort style properties.

MEALS
Breakfast daily.

GUIDES
We carefully select our local partners, some of whom we have worked with for over 25 years. Their English-speaking guides understand the expectations of our clients very well, and are consistently singled out for praise by the latter on their return.

SUMMARY OF NIGHTS
10 days, 9 nights: Cancún 1; Chichén Itzá 2; Mérida 3; Holbox 3.

CURRENCY
The unit of currency in Mexico is the Mexican peso.

HOW TO TAKE IT
Cash machines are available in all major cities and towns, such as Cancún and Mérida. Taking a debit or credit card with a PIN number is the most convenient way of withdrawing money while on your trip, and in many shops and restaurants you can also pay by card. However, since cards can get lost, damaged, withheld or blocked, you should not rely exclusively on a card to access funds. Not all petrol stations accept cards.

We recommend that additionally you take a reasonable quantity of US dollars cash which you can exchange into local currency. Dollar bills should be in good condition, soiled or torn bills may be refused. You can take sterling, but the exchange rate is not always competitive or even available, restricting the number of places where you can change money.

DAILY SPEND
It is very difficult to give a guideline for essential expenses but a budget of around US$45 per day per adult -less for children – should cover the cost of meals not included in the holiday itinerary, drinks and the odd souvenir. Eat at the best restaurants and you will pay considerably more. US$200 is an approximate fuel allowance for this trip.

TIPPING
Tips are expected and local guides often rely on their tip as a significant proportion of their income.

Most service industry workers will expect a tip of some kind and so it is useful to have spare change for hotel porters, taxi drivers and the like. It is common to leave 10 – 12% in restaurants.

Tipping guidelines can be found in our **Briefing Dossier**.

VISAS
Holders of a full British passport do not require a visa, although passports must be valid for at least 6 months after the trip begins. Anyone with a different nationality should enquire with us or check with the relevant consulate.

If flying to the US, or via the US you will need to fill in your online ESTA application.

AIRPORT TAXES
If you have purchased your flights through Journey Latin America, the international departure tax is usually included in the ticket.

TRIP SUITABILITY

There are no really long days of travel on the suggested routes of this trip. The routes from A to B take about 3hrs (max) but you may well want to make a detour or stop off for a while. Roads are generally in good condition but less used routes may have potholes. Signage on major roads is good, less so on minor roads. Many people speak a little English but a smattering of Spanish will stand you in good stead.

If you have a disability that we need to be aware of, please contact us.

In the months of June to August the weather is extremely hot and humid, you might want bear this in mind. July to November there are chances of tropical storms or hurricanes hitting the region.

CLIMATE

The Yucatán peninsula is hot (around 30°C) and humid all year round. October – April is the driest and sunniest period. The hurricane season runs from July to November.

CLOTHING AND SPECIAL EQUIPMENT

For day-to-day wear you should take loose-fitting, breathable clothes. Comfortable shoes are important and sports sandals are useful. A sun hat, sun block and sunglasses are necessary, and you should take a light fleece for cool nights and a breathable/waterproof outer layer and/or umbrella, as well as swimwear, a towel, insect repellant, sun block and a torch. If you plan to go to good restaurants or out for evening entertainment, you might bring something a bit smarter as well (although formal attire will not be required).

Please get in touch with the office before departure if you have any doubts.

VACCINATIONS

Preventative vaccinations are recommended against the following: tetanus; hepatitis A. You should consult your GP for specific requirements, including advice on yellow fever and malaria tablets.

You can also find helpful information on the Masta Travel Health website.

INSURANCE

Travel insurance is essential.

Details of our recommended policy can be found on our Travel Insurance page.

For the car, Loss Damage Waiver (CDW without excess, and inclusion of theft protection) is included as well as Third Party insurance

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GET IN TOUCH WITH US...

Our friendly, knowledgeable team of travel experts are always happy to chat about holiday ideas and share helpful advice. Give us a call today and begin planning your perfect trip to Latin America.

0208 747 8315

OPENING HOURS

Monday – Friday: 9am – 6pm
Saturday & Sunday: Closed

SEND US AN EMAIL

tours@journeylatinamerica.com