JOURNEY
LATIN AMERICA



PRIVATE JOURNEYS WITH JOURNEY LATIN

SELF-DRIVE MEXICO: DISCOVER THE YUCATAN PENINSULA

14 days from **£2,950pp**

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



WITH OVER 40 YEARS EXPERIENCE, NO-ONE KNOWS LATIN AMERICA LIKE WE DO

EXPERIENCE SOMETHING EXTRAORDINARY

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

On this Yucatán Peninsula self-drive holiday, enjoy a good road network that suits independent drivers who want flexibility to explore fascinating Mayan ruins and colonial towns. Car and hotels are pre-booked.

DAY 1	**Arrive in Cancún, collect hire car.**
DAY 2	**Drive to Mayan archaeological site at Chichén Itzá. Overnight.**
DAY 3	**Drive to hacienda near the historic city of Mérida, capital of Yucatan; 3 nights.**
DAY 4	**At leisure at your hacienda; explore Merida or visit Uxmal.**
DAY 5	**At leisure or drive to Celestún on the Gulf coast.**
DAY 6	**Drive to Campeche; 2 nights.**
DAY 7	**At leisure in this Spanish colonial city.**
DAY 8	**Drive to Calakmul; 2 nights.**
DAY 9	**Visit local Mayan sites and Calakmul.**
DAY 10	**Drive to the Caribbean coast; 3 nights.**
DAYS 11-12	**At leisure on the beach in the shadow of Tulum ruins; optional trips in the vicinity.**
DAY 13	**Drive to Cancún and drop off car at airport; take international flight home.**

ITINERARY

Mexico is ideal for independent exploration by self-drive car hire, particularly in the Yucatán peninsula and along the Caribbean coast. Your point-to-point itinerary planned out for you, with hotel reservations made in advance and maps provided, so you can explore the Mayan ruins and colonial towns at leisure..

Here, you'll find vestiges of the once supreme Maya 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. The best known sites, Chichén Itzá, Uxmal and Tulum are easily accessible; smaller, less well-known sites are always close to minor roads and with your own car you can explore at will.

You'll also visit graceful Spanish colonial towns with their friendly Maya inhabitants. Markets, restaurants and entertainments flourish here.

Round off at a beach hotel just north of Tulum on the Caribbean coast. Time to laze on the beach, take part in water sports or visit nearby resort towns.

DAY 1

Arrive in Cancún, collect hire car.

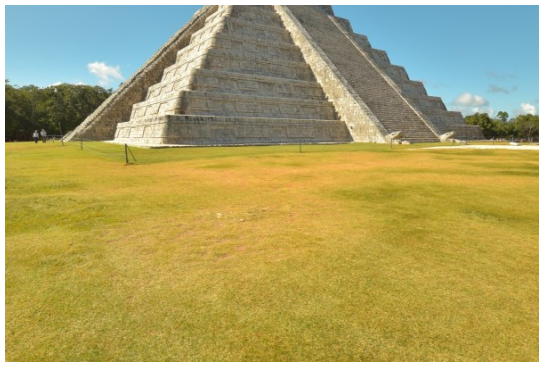


Our local partners will assist you with collection of you car upon arrival at Cancún airport. Your car will be a mid-sized Chevrolet Aveo (or similar) which will be your companion for 12 days. Other sizes of car are available but terms and conditions are subject to change. Drive to your hotel in town.

Cancún straddles a lagoon on the north-eastern tip of the Yucatán peninsula. It's a purpose-built resort with beautiful beaches, good diving and water sports. Alongside the facilities that come with five-star hotels are high-class shopping and fashionable nightclubs and bars.

DAY 2

Drive to Mayan archaeological site at Chichén Itzá. Overnight.



Drive inland to Chichén Itzá (2 hours direct) the grandest and most well organised of all the Mayan sites, dominated by the huge, symmetrical, stepped El Castillo pyramid. 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.

En route you might want to visit the 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.

Accommodation is a short walk from the site, and in the evening there is the option to return for the Sound and Light Show.

DAY 3

Drive to hacienda near the historic city of Mérida, capital of Yucatan; 3 nights.



Drive towards Mérida (2 hours direct), capital of the state of Yucatán and a hacienda-style hotel on the outskirts of the city which is your base for the next 3 nights.

The city of Mérida 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'. Its income came from the production of sisal, cactus fibres that are used to make rope, and it 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.

DAY 4

At leisure at your hacienda; explore Merida or visit Uxmal.



Merida is around 30-minutes' drive from your hotel. Stroll around the sunny streets, shop for local lace or one of the region's famous hammocks. Outside town you might drive to the ruined ceremonial temples of Uxmal, for many the most dramatic forest-clad Maya site. It's just over an hour from 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. This is the site with the most mystic ambience.

DAY 5

At leisure or drive to Celestún on the Gulf coast.



Also in contrast to the lively city of Mérida is Celestún on the remote, undeveloped and swampy gulf coast just 45 minutes' drive away. A low-key beach resort favoured by Mexican families, the once isolated fishing port has an inviting, broad white sandy beach and good seafood restaurants. But it is most famous for the lagoons at the entrance to town which are filled with rose-coloured flamingoes. Boat trips can be booked locally and there are car parking areas now. There are three main routes out of Mérida on the west side from the Pereferico. The newest route is via Tetiz and Kinchil, which is the quickest.

DAY 6

Drive to Campeche; 2 nights.



Drive to Campeche (2 hours direct) on the coast facing the Gulf of Mexico. The old walled city is a UNESCO World Cultural Heritage Site – pastel-painted mansions built by aristocratic Spanish families, pristine white churches and the shady zócalo main square evoke the city's era of glory. There's a lovely seaside promenade, perfect for walking at sunset.

DAY 7

At leisure in this Spanish colonial city.

At leisure to explore the city, or drive to the little-visited Mayan pyramid complex at Edzná, a few miles outside town.



DAY 8

Drive to Calakmul; 2 nights.

Drive southeast of Campeche and deep into the southern Yucatan Peninsula, today's destination being the Calakmul Biosphere Reserve. The journey takes around 4-5 hours, initially via the coastal road and the fishing port of Champoton where seafood stalls line the promenade. As you head inland, a landscape of lush cattle pasture and tropical forest takes over and shortly before tonight's accommodation a rich seam of Mayan archaeological sites begins. You may opt to stop off at the ruins of Balamku, which remain enveloped in forest.



Spend the next 2 nights at a rustic lodge, some 60km north of the archeological site of Calakmul.

Construction of the Tren Maya railway since the early 2020s is bringing significant change to these remote reaches of the Yucatán peninsula, which hitherto remained an off-the-beaten-track destination for adventurous travellers. It's realistic to anticipate ongoing construction as well as some heavy vehicles along the highway as associated development continues.

DAY 9

Visit local Mayan sites and Calakmul.



Calakmul is undoubtedly the main reason for visiting this region, smothered in rainforest, it's an important and very impressive site of what was once a vast and powerful city. There are 6,750 ancient structures identified there, the largest of which is the great pyramid at the site, at 45m high one of the highest temples of the Maya world.

Calakmul Biosphere Reserve is home to some wildcat species, such as the cougar, the ocelot and the emblematic jaguar, an endangered species and very precious in the Maya culture. Mammals living in this jungle are the howler monkey, spider monkey, anteater, armadillo and deer. There are almost 300 species of birds, among them: parakeets, toucans and wild turkeys. There are also about 50 species of reptiles and 400 of butterflies.

DAY 10

Drive to the Caribbean coast; 3 nights.



It's a good idea to set off bright and early for the 400km drive to the Caribbean coast near Tulum. We recommend a stop to stretch your legs at Kohunlich, another site surrounded by dense rainforest and which contains almost 200 mounds that remain largely unexcavated. The city was elaborately planned and engineered, with raised platforms and pyramids, citadels, courtyards and plazas surrounded with palace platforms, all laid out to channel drainage into a system of cisterns and an enormous reservoir to collect rainwater. Kohunlich is best known for its Temple of the Masks, a pyramid with a central stairway flanked by huge humanised stucco masks. Shortly before hitting the Caribbean coast is the town of Bacalar, famous for its mesmerising Lagoon of Seven Colours and a good place to stop for refreshments before the onward drive to your accommodation.

It's a further 3 hours or so to Tulum, until the late 1980s little more than a jumble of Mayan dwellings at the entrance to the ancient ruins. Now one of Mexico's foremost resorts, hedonists flock to modern-day Tulum's trendy bars, boutique hotels and all-night beach parties. Just north of the main hotel zone is quieter Tankah, your base for relaxation for the next 3 nights. Tulum's ruins – perhaps the most photographed in Mexico and perched above the aquamarine Caribbean – are 10km to the south.

DAYS 11-12

At leisure on the beach in the shadow of Tulum ruins; optional trips in the vicinity.



At leisure. Explore the ruins and relax on the beach below, or head inland to Mayan Cobá in the jungle. For a change from Mayan ruins you might visit the effervescent little resort of Playa del Carmen up the coast, a family-friendly place where there is a plethora of restaurants, bars, shops and entertainment. Alternatively drive to Sian Ka'an Biosphere Reserve which embraces tropical forest, mangrove and savannah and a coast and offshore marine reserve. The area is abundant with wildlife particularly aquatic birds. Other inhabitants include monkeys, tapirs, turtles, ocelots and jaguars. Guided boat trips through the wetlands can be organised locally.

DAY 13

Drive to Cancún and drop off car at airport; take international flight home.

INCLUDED EXCURSIONS

- None included - enquire for more information

ESSENTIALS

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

Here we always 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 and cosy, rustic and homely guesthouses.

Breakfast daily.

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

13 days, 12 nights: Cancún 1; Chichén Itzá 1; Mérida 3; Campeche 2; Calakmul 2; Caribbean Coast 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 (no more than is covered by your insurance), which you can exchange into local currency, and possibly some travellers' cheques, though these are gradually falling out of use (American Express are the most widely accepted). 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 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.

INSURANCE AND DOCUMENTS

Travel insurance is essential.

Details of our recommended policy can be found on our Travel Insurance page. Additional Liability and Loss Damage Waiver (CDW without excess and inclusion of theft protection) is included as well as Personal Accident and Third Party insurance

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.

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.

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 repellent 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.

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.

JOURNEY
LATIN AMERICA

PRIVATE JOURNEYS WITH JOURNEY LATIN

SELF-DRIVE MEXICO: DISCOVER THE YUCATAN PENINSULA

14 days from **£2,950pp**

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

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