



The Maya of Lowland and Highland Chiapas

Palenque, Bonampak, Yaxchilan, San Cristobal de Las Casas & Highland Region



Summary

Learn of the Ancient and Present Day Maya in the Chiapas Lowlands and Highlands. Arriving in Villahermosa, we have the opportunity to marvel at the Olmec culture and their monumental sculpture. Also in Villahermosa, Comalcalco is a rarely visited site, rich in stucco sculpture and made of brick! From here, we explore the high phase of Maya civilization at the former empire of Palenque, the murals of Bonampak, riverside Yaxchilan and hilltop fortress Tonina. From here, we travel to San Cristobal de Las Casas to learn of the present day Maya communities and their unique dress and rich textile traditions. By visiting the Tzotzil and Tzeltal Maya communities of Chamula, Zinacantan, Tenejapa, we are transported to a distant cultural universe. The Maya of this region, share the cosmology, dress, cultural heritage of their ancestors. Join us on this amazing journey that connects past and present.



Trip Includes:

- Accommodations
- Expert Guides and/or Academics
- Comfortable / Secure Transportation
- Welcome and Farewell Dinners
- Breakfasts
- Meals according to itinerary
- Water on Van/Coach
- Airport Transfers
- Entry Fees

Program Highlights

- Learn of the Olmec at Museo Parque La Venta.
- Learn about the Maya and Cacao at Comalcalco.
- Explore the Great Maya City of Palenque.
- See the Murals of Bonampak and the Lintels at Yaxchilan.
- Climb the Maya Hilltop Fortress of Tonina.
- Travel to San Cristobal de Las Casas to see Colonial Chiapas.
- Learn of the Work of Trudy and Franz Blom in the Lacandon Region by visiting Na Bolom.
- Visit surrounding Highland Maya communities such as Chamula, Zinacantan and Tenejapa.
- Take an optional extension into the vast canyon gorge of El Sumidero Canyon.
- Learn from expert guides, archeologists and local community members.



Itinerary

Day 1: Arrive Villahermosa, transfer to Hotel Cencali

Day 2: Museo Parque La Venta; Comalcalco Ruins, Cacao Plantation and Tasting. Our morning begins with a visit to one of the region's greatest cultural collections: Museo Parque La Venta, where over 30 colossal basalt heads and other sculptures were moved from the original Olmec city in the late 1950's, when oil exploration was growing. The Olmec flourished from about 900 – 400 BC, and are known as the 'mother culture' of all Mesoamerica. It is believed, the Olmecs descended from Eurasia, traversing the Bearing Straits and migrating South. In the afternoon, we visit the ancient Maya site of Comalcalco, the only pyramid built with bricks, followed by a special visit to a cacao plantation, where we learn of the importance and use of cacao in early Maya ceremony. We enjoy a traditional home cooked meal. From here, we transfer to Palenque, where we will learn of this great Classic Era empire. Dinner at hotel. (B,L)

Day 3: Palenque Site and Museum. Today, is dedicated to our on-site visit of Palenque to learn how life and society was organized during the Classic Period of Maya civilization. Palenque is one of the largest and most distinct Maya sites with a proliferation of sculptures and glyph inscriptions. Historians and anthropologists continue to decipher and document their findings at this site. We begin by visiting the world class, on-site museum where we learn about Maya glyph writing, and we see the spectacular incense burners and a replica of Pakal's tomb. From the museum, we venture out onto the site, visiting the Temple of the Inscriptions, The Cross Group and the Palace, all on a karst limestone escarpment. We enjoy a lively dinner at Don Muchos, a local favorite. (B,D)

Day 4: Bonampak, Yaxchilan. Our day begins with a guided visit to see the famous murals at Bonampak, depicting Classic era court life of the Maya. Our expert guide will lead us through the spectacular representations of the dress, civil, religious and military life of the Classic Maya, as seen in the famous murals at this site. We continue our exploration by visiting the sprawling Maya site, Yaxchilan. This river front early Mesoamerican center, is known for the fine examples of carvings and inscriptions on the lintels. We enjoy our lunch as we travel in our "lanchas" on the Usumacinta River. (B,L)

Day 5: Tonina, San Christobal de Las Casas Today, we say good-bye to the Lowlands and begin our drive towards the Chiapas Highlands, known for its light air and brilliant sun, at almost 7,000 feet. En route, we visit the hill-top Maya ruins of Tonina. Given its location, Tonina is less known, but is in fact one of the most spectacular Maya sites, given its hilltop setting and distinctive monumental style. We continue on our journey towards San Cristobal, where we check into our centrally located hotel and begin to get our first impressions of this colonial city named after Bartolome de las Casas, the first Bishop of Chiapas, who was known as the "conscience of the conquest", given his tireless campaigns to put an end to the conquest methods used by the Spanish. Our evening is at leisure in San Cristobal (B,L)

Day 6: Zinacantan and Chamula. We venture into the villages, of Zinacantan and Chamula, highland communities of Tzotzil speaking Maya. In Zinacantan, flowers are seen everywhere; from the cultivation of geraniums, carnations and mums, to the bright embroidered flowers on the blue huipil (a type of cape) worn by the wome. Daily life in this cheerful village centers on weaving and textile traditions for the women, and tending to religious and civic affairs, for the men. Not far in distance, but very different in mood and feel, we travel to the highland village of Chamula to learn more of this Tzotzil speaking Maya community. Entering the church, we leave the world we know and enter into a surreal, mystical place where eggs, coca cola and posh (sugar cane based firewater) comeingle in a religious ceremony dedicated to healing the infirm and driving out evil spirits. Returning to San Cristobal, we enjoy our comida at Na Bolom, followed by a guided tour of the museum, the former home and study center of Frans and Gertrude Blom, a Dane and a Swiss, who met on an expedition to the Lacandon jungle. Together, they dedicated their lives to the study and preservation of the Lacandon forest, people and culture. (B,L)

Day 7: Tenejapa. Today we travel to the Highland Community of Tenejapa. Thursdays are market day in Tenejapa, so we have a special treat in store, as we witness and this weekly showcase of foodstuffs, cloth and other items that are bought and sold. In addition, we will focus on the weaving traditions by visiting a special coop that produces extraordinary examples of their intricate designs. Upon return to San Cristobal, we have a free evening to explore in San Cristobal or sit in a local café. (B)

Day 8: San Andres Larrainzar and Magdalena. Today, we learn of the Ceremonial huipil from Magdalena and the layers of text and meaning of the woven designs and the form of the huipil, itself. Omnipresent in the Maya iconography are themes of underworld, material world and celestial world (3 planes), the elements (earth, wind, fire and water), and the cardinal points. In both communities we meet special weavers and dyers. Returning to San Cristobal, we visit the spectacular collection of Maya daily and ceremonial dress, belonging to Sergio Castro, a saintly, renaissance man who has spent much of his life dedicated to improving health conditions in highland Maya communities. Tonight we enjoy farewell dinner in San Cristobal de Las Casas. (B,D)



Transportation: Licensed, insured, comfortable and safe vans or coaches



Hotels: Centrally Located and Charming Properties in Palenque and San Cristobal de Las Casas



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