

CHIAPAS UP CLOSE:

*Including the Vibrant San Sebastian
Celebration in Chiapa de Corzo*



2014 Departure: January 18

6 days: San Cristobal, Chiapa de Corzo, San Juan Chamula, Zinacantán and nearby communities

9 days: includes an in-depth extension to Palenque, Bonampak, Yaxchilán & Villahermosa

Trip Overview

Our trip takes us to one of Mexico's least explored and most fascinating regions - Chiapas. With its many groups of indigenous peoples that fiercely maintain centuries old traditions, from style of dress to religious practice to their original Mayan languages, a journey through Chiapas offers a window into ancient Maya culture. Bask in colonial San Cristóbal's pastel colors, rustic charm and evocative markets and meet local contacts along the way who grant us privileged insiders' access into the living cultural heart of their vibrant region.

An extension to the dramatic lowland Chiapas is highly recommended, featuring three of Mesoamerica's most evocative ruins, all set against verdant jungle backdrops. In addition to their fabulous frescoes, carved lintels and stele, Bonampak & Yaxchilán are very rich in birdlife, while Palenque is widely regarded amongst the most spectacular of Maya city-states.

Signature Experiences

- **Colonial San Cristobal.** Explore the quaint cobblestone streets, churches & plazas of San Cristobal de las Casas, one of the loveliest colonial towns in Mexico.
- **Paper Dreams.** Tour the only indigenous-owned publishing house in Mexico, in the company of one of its founding members.
- **San Sebastian Celebration.** Participate in one of the most colorful folkloric celebrations in all of Mexico. One highlight of the weeklong celebration in Chiapa de Corzo is the procession of hundreds of fabulously costumed, rattle wielding "parachicos".
- **Hallowed Textiles:** Visit the most important repository of Maya textiles in Mexico at the newly installed Pellitzín Collection, housed in the beautifully restored Santo Domingo convent.
- **Healer, Helper:** Meet Sergio Castro, an iconic, altruistic figure in Chiapas for the last 45 years. An agronomist by training, Sergio has dedicated himself in recent years to treating – free of charge - indigenous burn victims from San Juan Chamula and surrounding communities.
- **Culinary Chiapas.** Roll up your sleeves for this hands-on cooking class with a celebrated local chef. Visit the open market & pick herbs in her private garden before entering our host's home kitchen to create fresh twists on classic *Chiapanecan* dishes.
- **Surreal Church.** Witness a church unlike any other in San Juan Chamula. The centuries old syncretism of animistic and Catholic beliefs results in a mystical and unique display of faith.
- **Majestic Maya.** Discover the mystical ruins of Toniná, Palenque, Bonampak & Yaxchilán.



Thumbnail Itinerary



Saturday, January 18: Arrive Tuxtla Gutierrez

Arrive to Tuxtla Gutierrez, the launching point for our Chiapas experience. Be met upon arrival at the airport by Culture Xplorers' locally based, bilingual trip leader and drive approximately one hour to your picturesque colonial base for the next five days, San Cristobal de las Casas. Enjoy dinner and an informal briefing on the adventurous days ahead. (Meals: D)

Lodging for five nights in San Cristobal will be at the cozy, upscale *Guayaba Inn*, a lovingly restored, traditional Chiapas home turned B&B with orchids and bromeliads in its peaceful central garden. For a preview visit: www.guayabainn.com

Sunday, January 19: Walking San Cristobal, Hallowed Textiles + Healer, Helper

San Cristobal is the perfect city for walking. Enjoy an in-depth waling exploration of its colonial churches, shady plazas and colorful local markets, including some under-the-radar neighborhood and workshop visits, such as the hand-made paper co-op *Taller Leñateros*, the only indigenous-owned publishing house in Mexico. Another visit is to the recently opened Pellitzín Collection, the most important repository of Maya textiles in Mexico, housed in the beautifully restored Santo Domingo convent. (Meals: B, L)

Later Meet Sergio Castro, a beloved folk hero in Chiapas, having dedicated his entire adult life to altruistic work. An agronomist by training, these days, he dedicates himself primarily to treating indigenous burn victims free of charge. Note: donations from visitors to his ethnographic museum help support this philanthropy and CX will make a contribution on your behalf.

Monday, January 20: Through the Gorge + La Gran Fiesta in Chiapa de Corzo

Take an exhilarating boat ride this morning through the towering rock wall gorges of Sumidero Canyon, which reach a dizzying height of 1,000 meters at their highest point. Sumidero Canyon is an area of tremendous biodiversity.

Continue to nearby *Chiapa de Corzo* to participate in one of the most colorful folkloric celebrations in all of Mexico. The weeklong January festival is punctuated with parades, festival foods, fireworks and the procession of hundreds of fabulously costumed, rattle wielding "parachicos" who represent the Spanish colonialists in an elaborate re-telling of the town's most famous legend.

Tuesday, January 21: Maya Mysticism, Village-to-Village Trek & Celebration in Zinacantán

Today begins with a scenic drive past the village of *Milpoleta* to the staunchly traditional indigenous community of San Juan Chamula. Here, centuries- old traditions are fiercely maintained, from the *Tzotzil* language to typical dress, from customs to religion. A highlight of a visit to Chamula is its utterly mystical church whose surreal interior if filled with faithful who combine Catholic and animistic beliefs and practices. *Note: photography inside the Chamula church or of the town's residents is strictly forbidden.* We'll also stop by the home of a Mayordomo, a rotating official charged with safeguarding some of Chamula's most sacred objects.



From Chamula, trek through the verdant countryside to Zinacantán, another Tzotzil-speaking community renowned for its flowers, both the ones it exports from local greenhouses as well as those embroidered on its vibrant textiles. Enter the rustic home & workshop of a local friend, whose family has prepared a simple, yet delicious lunch for you. (Meals: B, L)

Note: today is an exceptional opportunity to experience Zinacantán as its vibrant best, in the midst of the annual San Sebastian celebrations!

Wednesday, January 22: Culinary Chiapas

Led by a distinguished local chef, visit San Cristobal's bustling open market to discover Chiapas' rich variety of regional, seasonal produce. Continue to your host's lovely home. Pick fresh herbs from her organic garden before rolling-up your sleeves together for a hands-on, home-hosted, cooking class in which you'll create fresh twists on classic *Chiapanecan* dishes. (Meals: B, L)

Optional afternoon hike: work off your delicious, home-hosted lunch with an invigorating walk through the nearby Huitepec cloud forest reserve. This reserve is the habitat for native and migrant bird species, including: blue jays, wrens, robins, mockingbirds, motmots, and more. Our woodland stroll introduces you to the habitat & microclimates of varied cloud forest dwellers.

Head out together this evening to Na Bolom, a living museum and research center which documents and defends the historic, cultural and natural legacy of the Lacandón indigenous communities of lowland Chiapas. This living museum is also the site of our celebration dinner, with ingredients from their organic garden served at a festive, communal table. (Meals: B, L, D)

Thursday, January 23: Homeward Bound or Lowland Chiapas Extension

Private transfer to the Tuxtla Gutierrez airport for your flights to Mexico City and connections home or continue on our three day extension to the Mayan ruins of Toniná, Bonampak, Yaxchilán and Palenque. (Meals: B)

Palenque, Bonampak & Yaxchilán

(Minimum 2 Travelers)



Thursday, January 23: Toniná & Agua Azul

Prepare for 4 to 5 hours of total road time today, making it the longest drive of the trip. Wind down from San Cristóbal at 7,000 feet, to the tropical lowlands of Chiapas. Along the way, explore the dramatic ruins of *Toniná* and its outstanding on-site museum. Enjoy a relaxed picnic lunch near the ruins before continuing on to the spectacular waterfalls of *Agua Azul*. Arrive to our hotel in Palenque in the early evening. (Meals: B, L)

Lodging for three nights in Palenque will be at the recently opened boutique hotel *Quinta Chanabnal* or similar, best of class hotel. For a preview, visit: <http://www.quintachanabnal.com/>

Friday, January 24: Bonampak & Yaxchilán

Start early (6 am) and stop for breakfast en route at Valle Escondido. Transfer from land to water, taking a boat on the *Usumacinta* River for the one-hour ride to Yaxchilán. The stele, carved lintels and beautiful temples appear even more magnificent with the backdrop of the jungle, in the midst of tropical forest, monkeys and toucans. Our second site, Bonampak, is sometimes called the ‘Sistine Chapel of Mexico’ for its marvelous frescoes. *Note:* both Bonampak and Yaxchilán are protected biosphere reserves and terrific bird watching destinations. Return to Palenque in the early evening. (Meals: B, L)

Saturday, January 25: Palenque

Roberto Murphy, our trip leader and a resident expert on Palenque, regales us during our visit with a mixture of deep, academic knowledge and riveting personal anecdotes. Enjoy a leisurely walk around these lush ruins, plus a visit to its small, adjoining museum, finishing before the afternoon heat and sun are at their strongest. This afternoon, relax and wind down by the pool before reconvening for a celebratory farewell dinner. (Meals: B, D)

Sunday, January 26: Homeward Bound

Rise early for a two-hour drive to the Villahermosa airport in time for your flight to Mexico City and international connections home. (Meals: Boxed B, to be eaten on the drive)

Those travelers with afternoon flights may visit *Parque-Museo La Venta* with our trip leader. This leafy park is home to a fabulous collection of giant carved heads from one of Mesoamerica’s earliest civilizations, the Olmecs. Some of these sculpted heads measure more than two meters (6.6 feet) tall and weight over 15 tons.



Costs & Details



4+ Travelers: Ground Cost for 6 Days = \$1,995/pp (single room add \$375)

2 or 3 Travelers: Ground Cost for 6 Days = \$2,245/pp (single room add \$375)

Extension to Palenque, Bonampak & Yaxchilan = \$1,290/pp (single room add \$245)

Included:

- Our Chiapas-based, bi-lingual Culture Xplorers trip leader is widely regarded as one of the best guides in all Southern Mexico. He will accompany the group during all organized activities.
- Master weavers, an author & anthropologist, a founding member of an indigenous publishing house and other expert guests provide insights on the culture and living traditions of Chiapas.
- Signature experiences listed in the itinerary
- Lodging - double occupancy in charming, best of class hotels brimming with local character
- Meals: breakfast & lunch daily, plus (2) dinners during our core, 6-day journey
- Private transportation in modern, air conditioned vehicles (Mercedes Sprinter or similar)
- Entry fees to all museums, national parks, archaeological sites, etc.
- Bottled water provided aboard our vehicle throughout the journey
- Tips for baggage handling, our driver, at hotels and in restaurants for all included meals
- Private airport pick-up and drop-off on day of group's arrival and departure
- Comprehensive planning and study materials mailed 90 days before departure

Items not included and estimates:

- Airfare: arrive Tuxtla (TGZ), depart either TGZ or Villahermosa (VSA). Budget \$700
- Travelers' insurance covering medical treatment and evacuation
- Three meals during our core journey. Budget \$15/meal
- International departure & security taxes at airports. Budget \$40
- If traveling alone and opting for a single room, add \$375 for our 5-night trip or \$620 for 8 nights. Note: to avoid this fee, ask us to assign you a roommate. *If no roommate is available, the single room upgrade must be charged*
- Tip for Culture Xplorers trip leader. Budget \$5 - \$7/pp/day

Details:

- Max. travelers: 10 (2 minimum)
- Length of trip: 6 or 9 days plus international travel
- Activity level: *Moderately active*. Participants must be able to walk comfortably for 2- 3 hours per day at altitudes of up to 7,000 feet. Expect hilly terrain and cobblestone streets in San Cristobal and walking on unpaved paths and up and down stairs at archaeological ruins.

