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Information for the First Lady's Speech in Merida, Mexico

Mexican Conservation Corps
[Through Partners of the America, 20 Mexican states are linked with 6 U.S. states, to provide a network of volunteers for technical assistance and support.]

In 1994 with funding from USAID, Partners of the Americas initiated the *Cuerpos de Conservacion Mexicanos* (Mexican Conservation Corps - MCC). Modeled after the successful California Conservation Corps, the MCC matches job training for youth and young adults with natural resource needs. MCC members between the ages of 15 and 35 assist with agriculture and forestry projects, work on trail construction, help with recycling efforts and carry out historical preservation and conservation activities.

Local corps are carrying out projects throughout Mexico that teach conservation skills to young people, nurture their leadership abilities, and promote wise stewardship of the country's natural resources. The program enjoys the support of the Mexican government, local environmental organizations, and Mexican and international corporations and foundations.

Hundreds of "graduates" of the MCC program are now affiliated with Mexican conservation organization, which in collaboration with the *Fondo Mexicano para la Conservacion de la Naturaleza* (Mexican Nature Conservation Fund - MNCF), are training Community Teachers throughout Mexico. Once trained, these volunteers work in small communities teaching children and the general public the importance of protecting the environment.

Mexican Nature Conservation Fund

The MNCF began with a $20 million USAID contribution establishing the Fund's endowment. The Government of Mexico has pledged an additional $10 million ($4 million contributed to date), and the international community through the Global Environment Facility has provided an additional $17.5 million.

The MNCF provides a sustainable source of funding for the conservation of biological diversity in Mexico. Two major results are expected:

(1) conservation of biological diversity resulting from grants to Mexican private and non-governmental organizations; and,

(2) strengthening of environmental institutions in Mexico to take leadership roles in biodiversity conservation

MNCF priorities were established through a participatory process involving 6 regional meetings with 450 participants from 250 NGOs and community groups; local experts will help evaluate proposals.

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Partners of the Americas and Cuerpos de Conservacion Mexicanos (CCM)

Background

Partners of the Americas works with the *Cuerpos de Conservacion Mexicanos* (Mexican Conservation Corps) in Mexico. Through Partners of the Americas, twenty Mexican states are Partner states with the U.S.. Yucatan partners with Iowa; Mexico City partners with San Francisco; Oklahoma partners with 11 Mexican states; Texas with five; Arizona with one; and New Mexico with three. Through these partnerships, Partners of the Americas works jointly with *Cuerpos de Conservacion Mexicanos* (Mexican Conservation Corps) to involve youth in the environment along the lines of FDR's Civil Conservation Corps (CCC). USAID funds Partners activities that not only promote development but build lasting human linkages between the U.S. and Latin America.

USAID/Mexico is the primary source of funds for the Partners of the Americas Conservation Corps Program. Partners is now developing similar programs in other countries of the hemisphere based on the success of the USAID model in Mexico.

The Mexican Conservation Corps (CCM) is collaborating with the Fondo Mexicano Para la Conservacion de la Naturaleza (Mexican National Conservation Fund) to train Community Teachers throughout Mexico. Once trained the volunteers work in small communities teaching children and the general public the importance of protecting the environment.

The President and Mrs. Clinton have links to Partners that go back to the Arkansas/Bolivia Partnership when President Clinton was Governor.

Site Visit

This project, called Conservemos la Riqueza Natural y Cultural de Cuxtal will be inaugurated on May 4th, 1997. Visitors will see corps members meeting with children and their parents and will take part in the teaching of a module to the children that includes making and using puppets.

As part of the launching of this project on May 4, Community Teachers will conduct an environmental education project in the Mayan community Hacienda Tzebacahu located in the Cuxtal Ecological Reserve on the outskirts of Merida.

The activities will take place in a 19th century hacienda.

Today, however, placidity reigns in this agricultural market town. The center is mostly colonial, although it has many 19th-century structures. The main sights are the **colonial churches,** principally the large **cathedral** on the central square and the 16th-century **San Bernardino Church and Convent** three blocks southwest. The latter were pillaged during the insurrection.

Valladolid is renowned for its cuisine, particularly its sausages. Try one of the restaurants within a block of the square, which also has two very good and reasonably priced hotels. You can also find good buys on sandals, baskets, and the local liqueur, Xtabentún, made from honey.

To Uxmal and the Puuc Route

Follow Route 180 south and turn onto Route 261 at Umán; 80 kilo-
㉒ meters (50 miles) farther south you'll reach **Uxmal.** If Chichén Itzá is the most impressive Maya ruin in Yucatán, Uxmal is arguably the most beautiful. Where the former has a Toltec grandeur, the latter seems more understated and elegant—pure Maya. The architecture reflects the late classic renaissance of the 7th–9th centuries and is contemporary with that of Palenque and Tikal, among other great Maya metropolises of the southern highlands.

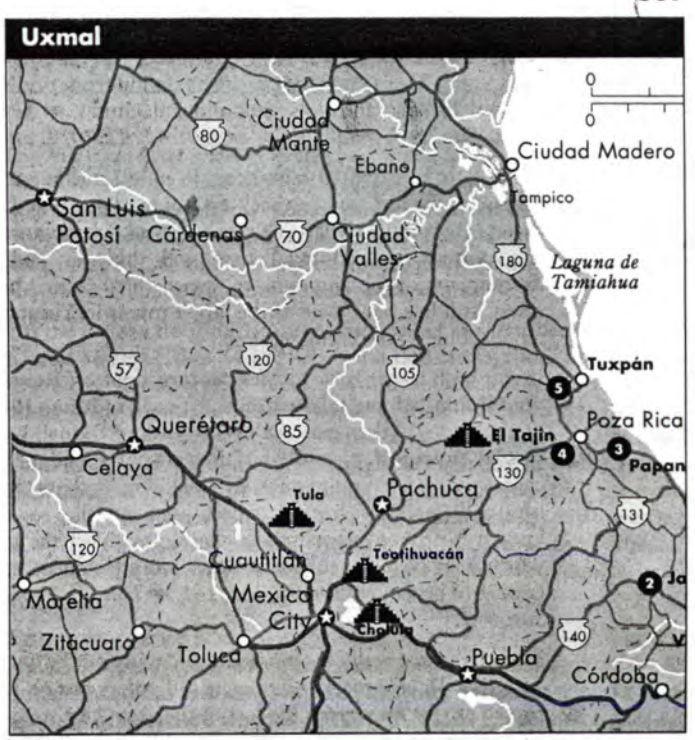
The site is considered the finest and largest example of Puuc architecture, which embraces such details as ornate stone mosaics and friezes on the upper walls, intricate cornices with curled noses, rows of columns, and soaring vaulted arches. Lines are clean and uncluttered, with the horizontal—especially the parallelogram—preferred to the vertical. Many of the flat, low, elongated buildings were built on artificial platforms and laid out in quadrangles.

While most of Uxmal remains unrestored, three buildings in particular merit attention. The most prominent, the **Pyramid of the Magician,** is, at 125 feet high, the tallest structure at the site. Unlike most Maya pyramids, which are stepped and angular, it has a strangely elliptical design. Built five times, each time over the previous structure, the pyramid has a stairway on its western side that leads through a giant mask of the rain god, Chac, with its mouth wide open to two temples at the summit.

West of the pyramid lies the **Nunnery,** or Quadrangle of the Nuns considered by some to be the architectural jewel of Uxmal. You may enter the four buildings; each comprises a series of low, gracefully repetitive chambers that look onto a central patio. Elaborate decoration blankets the upper facades, in contrast with the smooth, sheer blocks that face the lower walls. The mosaics thrust into the upper facade are huge, sometimes surpassing several feet in size.

Continue walking south; you'll pass the ball court before reaching the **Palace of the Governor,** which archaeologist Victor von Hagen considered the most magnificent building ever erected in the Americas. Interestingly, the palace faces east while the rest of Uxmal faces west. Archaeologists believe this is because the palace was used to sight the planet Venus. Covering five acres and rising over an immense acropolis, the palace lies at the heart of what must have been Uxmal's administrative center. Decorating the facade are intricate friezes that required more than 20,000 individually cut stones.

First excavated in 1929 by the Danish explorer Franz Blom, the site



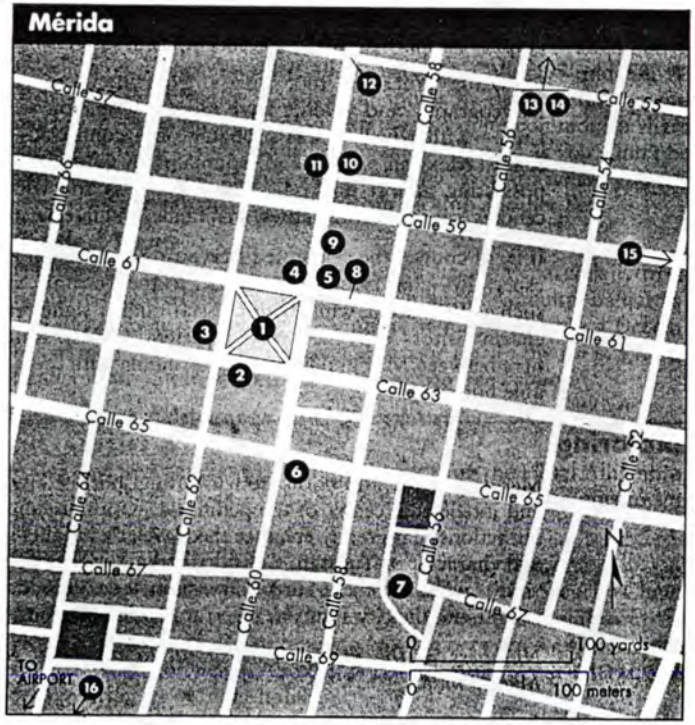
light show recounts Maya legends, including the kidnapping of an Uxmal princess by a king of Chichén Itzá, and focuses on the people's dependence on rain—thus the cult of Chac. The artificial colored light brings out details of carvings and mosaics that are easy to miss when the sun is shining. The show is performed nightly in English and is one of the better such productions. ☛ *Site and museum: $6, free on Sun. and holidays. Parking: $1. Use of video camera: $8.* ☉ *Daily 8–5. Sound-and-light show in English: $4.50, 9 PM.*

Four smaller Puuc sites near Uxmal are also worth visiting, and en
㉓ route you pass through beautiful hilly jungles. **Kabah,** 23 kilometers (14 miles) south of Uxmal on Route 261, lies almost entirely in ruins; its mounded landscape has a soft, almost Grecian beauty. Linked to Uxmal by a sacbe, at the end of which looms a great independent arch, is the 151-foot-long **Palace of the Masks** (also known as **Codz-Poop** or "coiled mat"), so called because of the 250 Chac masks.

㉔ Five kilometers (3 miles) to the south you'll see the turnoff to **Sayil,** or "home of ants," the oldest site of the group, renowned primarily for its majestic three-story **palace** with 70 rooms. The structure recalls Palenque in its use of multiple planes, its columned porticos and sober cornices, and in the play of its long, graceful horizontal masses. ☛ *$4, free on Sun. and holidays.* ☉ *Daily 8–5.*

Another 9 kilometers (6 miles) beyond Sayil, on Route 261, rests the
㉕ monumental arch at **Labná.** This lovely arch, called "La Puerta" or "The Gateway," is a fanciful corbeled arch rising high into a near peak with elaborate latticework and a small chamber on each side of it. One of the true curiosities of Maya civilization is that the Maya never discovered the true, or curved, arch. ☛ *$4, free on Sun.* ☉ *Daily 8–5.*

Casa de Montejo, **2**
Catedral, **5**
Ermita de Santa Isabel, **16**
Mercado de Artesanías "García Rejón", **6**
Mercado Municipal, **7**
Museo de Arte Popular, **15**
Museo de la Ciudad, **8**
Palacio Cantón, **14**
Palacio del Gobierno, **4**
Palacio Municipal, **3**
Parque Hidalgo, **9**
Parque Santa Lucía, **12**
Paseo de Montejo, **13**
Plaza Principal, **1**
Teatro Peón Contreras, **10**
Universidad Autonoma de Yucatán, **11**



destroyed during the Revolution. According to legend, the Christ figure was carved from a tree that had burned all night yet appeared the next morning unscathed. A later fire left the statue covered with the blisters for which it is named.

Head two blocks south from the cathedral along Calle 60 to Calle 65, Mérida's main shopping street. This bustling heart of the commercial quarter is lined with, among other businesses, banks and perfumeries.

6 Turn left to the **Mercado de Artesanías "García Rejón,"** a market where you'll find local handicrafts and souvenirs. Shops selling dry goods, straw hats, and hammocks occupy both sides of Calle 65. A block farther east, between Calles 56 and 58, stand two picturesque 19th-century edifices housing the **main post office** and **telegraph buildings.**

7 Behind them sprawls the pungent, labyrinthine **Mercado Municipal,** where almost every patch of ground is occupied by native Mexican women selling chilies, herbs, and fruit. On the second floor of the main building is the **Bazar de Artesanías Municipales,** the principal handicrafts market, where you can buy jewelry, pottery, embroidered clothes, hammocks, and straw bags.

8 History lovers should stop in at the small but informative **Museo de la Ciudad,** on Calle 61 between Calles 60 and 58, housing prints, drawings, photographs, and other displays that recount Mérida's past. *Calle 61 at Calle 58, no ☎.* ☛ *Free.* ☉ *Tues.–Sun. 8–8.*

North of the square on Calle 60 there are many noteworthy parks and historic buildings, including, only half a block away, the small,

9 cozy **Parque Hidalgo,** or Cepeda Peraza, as it is officially known.

corners of the park, which comes alive at night with marimba bands and street vendors.

10 Just north of the park, on Calle 60 is the Italianate **Teatro Peón Contreras,** designed in 1908 along the lines of the grand European turn-of-the-century theaters and opera houses. Today, in addition to performing arts, the theater also houses temporary art exhibits and the main **Centro de Información Turística** (☎ 99/24–91–22), which can provide information about local attractions. A new café serving cappuccino and light snacks spills out to a patio from inside the theater to the right of the Information Center.

11 Opposite the theater, the arabesque **Universidad Autonoma de Yucatán** plays a major role in the city's cultural and intellectual life.

12 Heading north on Calle 60, you'll pass the **Parque Santa Lucía** on your left, at Calle 55. The rather plain park draws crowds to its Thursday-night serenades, performed by local musicians. The small church opposite the park dates from 1575 and was built as a place of worship for the African and Caribbean slaves who lived here.

13 Beginning at Calle 47 and running adjacent and roughly parallel to Calle 56, the 10-block-long street known as the **Paseo de Montejo** exemplifies the Parisian airs the city took on in the late 19th century, when wealthy plantation owners were building opulent, impressive mansions. The broad boulevard, lined with tamarinds and laurels, is sometimes wistfully referred to as Mérida's Champs-Elysées. The

14 most compelling of the mansions, the pale peach **Palacio Cantón,** presently houses the **Museum of Anthropology and History,** dedicated to the culture and history of the Maya; it's one of the finest of its type in the country. Although bilingual legends accompany the fascinating displays, lengthier explanations are in Spanish only; private guides are available for hire. There's also an excellent bookstore. *Calle 43 at Paseo de Montejo,* ☎ *99/23–05–57.* ☛ *$4.50.* ☉ *Tues.–Sat. 9–8; Sun. 8–2; bookstore open weekdays 9–3.*

The Paseo de Montejo continues north, eventually becoming the road to Progreso. Before turning back from the museum, walk a few blocks north; you'll pass numerous restaurants and several hotels.

15 Several blocks east of the plaza, along Calle 59 to Calle 52, the **Museo de Arte Popular** is housed in a fine old mansion. The ground floor is devoted to Yucatecan arts and crafts, displaying weaving, straw baskets, filigree jewelry, carved wood, beautifully carved conch shells, exhibits on huipil manufacture, and the like. The second floor focuses on the popular arts of the rest of Mexico. *Calle 59, at the corner of Calle 52, no ☎.* ☛ *Free.* ☉ *Tues.–Sat. 8–8.*

16 At the far south of the city, about nine blocks south of the square at Calles 66 and 77, stands the **Ermita de Santa Isabel** (circa 1748), part of a Jesuit hermitage. A resting place in colonial days for travelers heading to Campeche, the restored chapel is an enchanting spot to visit at sunset. Next door there's a little garden with a waterfall and footpaths bordered with bricks and colored stones.

To Chichén Itzá and Valladolid

Numbers in the margin correspond to numbers on the State of Yucatán map.

Taxis can be hailed on the street, or—more reliably—commissioned from the main **taxi stand** (Calle 8 between Calles 55 and 53, ☎ 981/6–23–66 or 981/6–52–30) or at stands by the bus stations and market. Because of the scarcity of taxis, it's quite common to share them with other people headed in the same direction as you. Don't be surprised to see one already occupied slow down to where you are standing if the cab driver thinks he can pick up another fare.

Guided Tours

A three-hour walking and driving tour of the city departs daily from Baluarte San Carlos (Av. 16 de Septiembre at Circuito Baluartes) every afternoon at 4 during the months of July, August and December, as well as during Holy Week (March or April); the fee is $5. For further information contact the tourist office (*see below*).

Important Addresses and Numbers

EMERGENCIES

Police (Av. Resurgimiento s/n, a half block from the Hotel Alhambra, ☎ 981/6–23–29, or, in town, 06); **Red Cross** (Av. Resurgimiento s/n, ☎ 981/5–24–11).

LATE-NIGHT PHARMACIES

Clínica Campeche (Av. Central No. 65, near the Social Security Clinic, ☎ 981/6–56–12) is open 24 hours. The **Farmacia Alhambra** in the Hotel Alhambra (Av. Resurgimiento No. 85, between Av. Universidad and Av. Augusto Melgar, ☎ 981/1–12–46), open 7 AM–11 PM, will deliver to guests of other hotels.

VISITOR INFORMATION

The headquarters of the **State of Campeche Office of Tourism** is currently at Calle 12, No. 153 (☎ 981/6–67–67); however, it will soon be moved. Two smaller offices are located at Circuito Baluartes between Calles 12 and 14 (☎ 981/6–73–64) and Baluarte Santa Rosa (*see* Exploring, *above*). All three offices are open weekdays 9–3 and 6–9, Saturday 9–1.

MÉRIDA AND THE STATE OF YUCATÁN

Updated by Patricia Alisau

There is a marvelous eccentricity about Mérida. Fully urban, with maddeningly slow-moving traffic, it has a self-sufficient, self-contented air that would suggest a small town more than a state capital of some 600,000 inhabitants (locals say there are 850,000). Gaily pretentious turn-of-the-century buildings have an Iberian-Moorish flair for the ornate, but most of the architecture is low-lying and although the city sprawls, it is not imposing. Grandiose colonial facades adorned with iron grillwork, carved wooden doors, and archways conceal marble tiles and lush gardens; horse-drawn carriages hark back to the city's heyday as the wealthiest capital in Mexico.

In addition to the European influence, the native Mexican presence is unmistakable: People are short and dark-skinned, with sculpted bones and almond eyes; women pad about in *huipiles* (hand-embroidered, sacklike white dresses), and craftsmen and vendors from the outlying villages come to town in their huaraches. So many centuries after the conquest, Yucatán remains one of the last great strongholds of Mexico's indigenous population. To this day, in fact, many Maya do not even speak Spanish, primarily because of the peninsula's geographic and, hence, cultural isolation from the rest of the country.

Physically, Yucatán, too, differs from the rest of the country. Its geography and wildlife have more in common with Florida and Cuba—with which it was probably once connected—than with the central Mexican plateau and mountains. A mostly flat limestone slab possessing almost no bodies of water, it is rife with underground cenotes, caves with stalactites, small hills, and intense jungle.

It is, of course, the celebrated Maya ruins—Chichén Itzá and Uxmal especially—that bring most tourists to the Yucatán, but small towns such as Valladolid, while bereft of star-quality sightseeing attractions, charm visitors with their very unpretentiousness. Rains fall heaviest here between May and November, bringing with them an uncomfortable humidity.

Exploring

Mérida's traffic and noise are frustrating, but the city is the cultural and intellectual center of the peninsula, with museums, schools, and attractions that greatly enhance the traveler's insights into the history and character of Yucatán. Consider making it one of the first stops in your travels, and make sure your visit includes a Sunday, when traffic is light and the city seems to revert to a more gracious era.

Numbers in the margin correspond to points of interest on the Mérida map.

❶ Begin at the **main square,** which the Meridanos are beginning to call the *zócalo* along with its traditional names, the Plaza Principal and Plaza de la Independencia. Ancient, geometrically pruned laurel trees and *confidenciales*—S-shaped benches designed for tête-à-têtes—invite lingering. The plaza was laid out in 1542 on the ruins of T'hó, the Maya city demolished to make way for Mérida, and is still the focal point around which the most important public buildings cluster.

❷ The **Casa de Montejo** sits on the south side of the plaza, on Calle 63. Montejo—father and son—conquered the peninsula and founded Mérida in 1542; they built this stately French-style palace ten years later. The property remained with the family until the late 1970s, when it was restored and converted into a bank. Step into the building weekdays between 9 and 5 to glimpse the lushly foliated inner patio.

❸ Continue around to the west side of the square, occupied by the 17th-century **Palacio Municipal** (Calle 62, between Calles 61 and 63)—the city hall—which is painted yellow and trimmed with white arcades, balustrades, and the national coat of arms.

❹ Occupying the northeast corner of the square is the **Palacio del Gobierno,** or Governor's Palace (Calle 61, between Calles 60 and 62), built in 1885 on the site of the Casa Real (Royal House). The upper floor of the Governor's Palace contains Fernando Castro Pacheco's murals of the history of Yucatán, painted in 1978.

❺ The oldest **Catedral** on the North American mainland stands catercorner from the Palacio del Gobierno. Begun in 1561, it took several hundred Maya laborers, working with stones from the pyramids of the ravaged Maya city, 36 years to complete. Its Renaissance-style facade is stark and unadorned, with gunnery slits instead of windows, and faintly Moorish spires. Inside, the black **Cristo de las Ampollas** (Christ of the Blisters) next to the altar is a replica of the original,

WHEN ASKED what attracts them to Mexico, most visitors will mention beaches and ruins—and some of the best of each are found on the Yucatán Peninsula.

Yucatán comprises Mexico's most popular tourist destination, Cancún, and some of the country's most celebrated ruins, the pre-Columbian cities of the Maya. While much of the peninsula is vast, scrubby desert—"one living rock," as an early Spanish priest put it—with a smattering of jungles and hills, its eastern coastline on the clear, turquoise waters of the Caribbean has superb natural endowments. In addition to a semi-tropical climate, the Caribbean coast offers unbroken stretches of beach and the world's fifth-longest barrier reef, which lies just off the island of Cozumel. Also part of the Yucatán is the diminutive Isla Mujeres (Isle of Women) and, on the west side of the peninsula, Mérida, a city that deserves more tourists than it gets. Mérida was one of the first cities built by the Spaniards, and it retains its colonial ambience and charm.

The peninsula's spectrum of attractions is matched by an equal range of accommodations, from the never-leave-the-site resorts of Cancún to more modest properties near the ruins and humble but adequate beach shacks. Yucatán therefore appeals to travelers of all budgets and inclinations, from package tour–takers to backpackers and travelers who prefer to rent a car. It offers bird-watching, water sports, archaeology, handicrafts, and the savory Yucatecan cuisine. Above all, however, there are the *Yucatecos* themselves: Veteran travelers to Mexico often remark on the openness and friendliness of these people who, like their Maya ancestors, are short and swarthy, with prominent cheekbones and aquiline noses.

The peninsula encompasses the states of Yucatán, Campeche, Quintana Roo (until 1974 a Mexican territory), Belize, and a part of Guatemala, and covers 113,000 square kilometers (43,630 square miles). International airports at Cancún and Cozumel provide nonstop service from several North American cities; the Mérida airport handles primarily domestic flights. Cruise ships call at Cozumel and Playa del Carmen, and other harbor facilities are being developed at Progreso on the north coast off the Gulf of Mexico.

CANCÚN

Updated by Melissa Rivers

Flying into Cancún, Mexico's most popular destination, all you see are green treetops for miles. It's clear from the air that this resort was literally carved out of the jungle. When development began here in 1974, the beaches were deserted except for their iguana inhabitants. Now, luxury hotels line the oceanfront, and nearly 2 million visitors a year come for the white sand beaches and crystalline Caribbean waters. They also come for the sizzling nightlife and, in some cases, for proximity to the Yucatán ruins. Although the resort is too glitzy and tourist-oriented for some, it draws thousands of repeat visitors.

Cancún City is on the mainland, but the hotel zone is on a 22½-kilometer (14-mile) barrier island off the Yucatán peninsula. The resort is designed to please American tastes; most people speak English, and devotees of cable TV and Pizza Hut will not be disappointed. Dedicated beach bums will cherish the cool, white, porous limestone sand and clear blue waters here, and the sun shines an average of 240 days

Uxmal (Pronounce Oosh-MAHL)

This Classic/ post-Classic Mayan city is one of the great showpieces of Mayan architecture and artistic refinement. Uxmal means "thrice built" reflecting the city's many phases of development. Throughout you will see clean, uncluttered lines and symmetry, and purist examples of the ornate and whimsical "Puuc" style. The whole site has been expertly restored. The city's main temple is the Pyramid of the Magician, an unusual oval structure. The Nunnery is a exceptional example of Puuc ornamentation. The Governor's Palace is a majestic 322 foot long master-piece of intricate lattice-work and mosaics.

Located 48 miles south of Mérida, Uxmal is accessible via several escorted tours. Time permitting, do not miss the superb light and sound show performed in English and Spanish evenings during the winter months.

For those want to explore other area ruins, overnight lodging is available at the Hotel Hacienda Uxmal (tel. (99) 247142, Misión Uxmal (tel. (99) 17500), and the Villas Arqueológicas, operated by Club Med.

Nearby Uxmal are the sites to Sayil, Kabah, and Labná, each noted for its Baroque, ornamental "Puuc" style.

The Discovery of Mexico

The first recorded sighting of what is now Mexico occurred in 1517. Bernal Díaz del Castillo was the chronicler of the first expeditions and the *Conquest of New Spain*, as he called his book, is still the best guide on the subject. Three boats under the command of the rich hidalgo who financed the expedition reached the north-eastern coast of Yucatán twenty-one days after leaving Cuba. Sighting a large settlement with white stone temples, they were convinced that they had reached Cathay, the land of the Great Khan, so they named the city "the Great Cairo."

The first two expeditions failed to gain a foothold on the mainland. The second expedition, under Juan de Grijalva, brought back enough gold trinkets taken from the Indians of Tabasco to make Diego Velázquez, the governor of Cuba and financial backer of the expedition, a rich man. The glint of gold worked up enormous enthusiasm for further explorations. Velázquez set about organizing a third expedition. He put up part of the money, but as he had no intention of leading it personally, he looked about for a partner who would put up the rest and take charge of the entire venture. Many aspirants came forward. In the end, Velázquez settled on Cortés, against the advice of his courtiers.

Since dropping out of Salamanca, Cortés had led the picaresque existence typical of a poor hidalgo's son whose ambitions far exceeded his means. He shipped out to Cuba, eventually settling down in the eastern city of Santiago. In time he made a modest fortune farming, mining and acting as a free-lance lawyer on the side.

This was hardly the life he had dreamed of. In 1519 he was 34 years old, his time was running short. So when Velázquez chose him to head the third expedition, he mortgaged his lands and houses, sold his Indians, and invested the total proceeds in the eleven-boat expedition. Velázquez began to have misgivings. As the date of departure approached, Cortés was warned that Velázquez was replacing him, so he set forth before the appointed day and thereby foiled the governor's plans.

The official purpose of the expedition was to record events and map the western seas; to rescue the Christians from a previous sortie reputedly kept in captivity; to win the Indians over to the service of his Catholic Majesty, Charles V, to instruct them in the Christian faith, "and as a sign of submission to him to send great quantities of gold, gems, pearls and other things that they might have . . ."

Reaching the island of Cozumel, east of Yucatán, Cortés set about tracking down the shipwrecked Spaniards. Only two had survived. Of the two survivors, one had taken a native wife and had sired several children who thus became the first true Mestizos in the land. He had gone completely native and had no desire to leave his family. The second, Jerónimo de Aguilar, being a cleric, had remained celibate. When he presented himself before Cortés in a canoeful of Indians, Cortés asked, "Where is the Spaniard?" One of the naked, sunburnt men, with only a loincloth "to cover his shame" spoke up: "*Soy yo*," he said. Even his accent was strange. He unwrapped a small Book of Hours from a bundle of tattered clothes as proof of his identity. Cortés took him aboard, gave him "Christian" clothing, and from that moment on, Aguilar, with his knowledge of the Mayan language and customs, became an invaluable assistant.

The expedition then sailed along the coast of Yucatán toward the mainland until reaching the great Grijalva river of Tabasco, named after the Spanish captain who had discovered it. It was on that occasion that the natives had showed themselves so friendly and given Grijalva and his men the gold which had so excited Velázquez and the other Spaniards in Cuba. Now, however, they were definitely hostile and Cortés, landing, had to fight his first battle, in which he acquitted himself like a seasoned campaigner. The Indians were defeated by their own ceremonial approach to war as much as by the surprise of Spanish firearms and horses. They jumped and yelled

instead of attacking, throwing fistfuls of dust and leaves up into the air to conceal their dead comrades from the enemy.

The Indians finally surrendered. Gifts changed hands – glass beads for gold ag and twenty slave women "to cook" for the Spaniards on their boat. When asked where the gold came from, the Indians pointed west, repeating the words "Culhua" and "Mexico," which meant nothing even to Aguilar. The Spaniards left on Palm Sunday after mass. The slave women were baptized. Then, to the Indians' astonishment, one by one the iron warriors kissed a cross made of fresh cut sapling before they returned to the boat. Thus Cortés, his Mercedarian chaplain and his soldiers established the ritual they were to follow after every landing and every victory in the course of the Conquest of Mexico.

The Founding of Veracruz

The best gift Cortés was ever to receive was an inquisitive, restless, good-look slave woman, who pestered Aguilar, asking for the names and uses of things. Her o name was Malinali, so they baptized her Marina, which was as close as they could g to it in Spanish. Her usefulness was not recognized until they reached the desolate sand dunes of what is now Veracruz. There Cortés, landing again, finally came face face with Moctezuma's ambassadors. Nobody understood a word they said except f Marina. They spoke Náhuatl, her native tongue. She translated into Maya, and Agui then passed it on in Spanish. Her resourcefulness far exceeded her usefulness as a translator. After Veracruz, she became indispensable to Cortés, whose bed she cam to share as well as his thoughts. She was wily, tactful, possessive. By her desire to please the Spaniard, she turned herself into a diplomatist of genius. She presented hi to the natives in the best possible light, lacing his proposals with the euphemisms a compliments that still constitute the most effective passport for Mexican travel. Aft his eventual triumph, Cortés gave doña Marina a handsome settlement and married her off to one of his own men, Juan de Jaramillo, who is recorded as having got almost too drunk to attend his own wedding. Mexico remembers her with great cruelty as a betrayer of her people, conveniently forgetting that her own people had sold her into slavery. Her name has given us the word *malinchismo* to indicate the servile adoption of foreign values and customs in preference to our own, regardless their merit. It is a term of profoundest scorn which does injustice to the memory of doña Marina.

In Veracruz, Moctezuma's ambassadors failed to persuade Cortés to take the Emperor's gifts and go away. In a last desperate attempt, Moctezuma sent Cortés those treasures which were soon to astonish Europe. It was, of course, exactly the wrong thing to do. Nothing could persuade the Spaniards to turn back after they ha seen the gold and silver jewelry spread out on the sand and a helmet full of gold.

Realizing their mistake, the Aztec ambassadors disappeared as unexpectedly as they had come. The Spaniards faced a dilemma. To remain in the vast emptiness co mean either death by starvation or on the sacrificial altars of the obviously powerful Moctezuma. To return to Çuba meant sacrificing honor, glory and treasure to Velázquez, and probably bëing excluded from future expeditions. The stranded Spaniards were divided between those who were loyal to Velázquez and those who urged Cortés to conquer the land, though this was not the expedition's purpose.

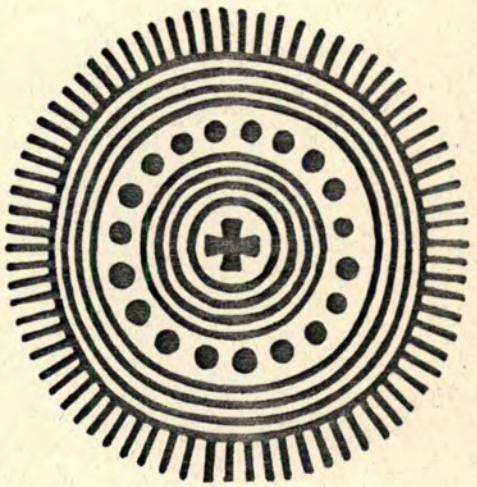
Taking a legalistic line, Cortés found a way to bow to the will of the latter grou which coincided nicely with his own ambitions. He called on the expedition's scrivener to testify that on a certain day – and he chose Good Friday as being suitab – the Rich City of the True Cross (Veracruz) was founded in the name of their most Catholic Majesties. Aldermen were chosen, and as the new city lay outside Velázque

jurisdiction, Cortés, whose authority derived from Velázquez, formally tendered his resignation. The City Council accepted it, considered the situation, and presently summoned Cortés to inform him that they had elected him Chief Justice and Captain General, agreeing also to give him a fifth of the expedition's proceeds after the deduction of the royal fifth. The whole thing went like clockwork.

A few days after the Aztecs had vanished, other Indians appeared who inadvertently showed Cortés the way to defeat Moctezuma. These Totonac Indians, sent by the Fat Cacique of nearby Cempoala, informed Cortés that the Aztecs were hated throughout the land. The Fat Cacique – so fat he could not come personally to greet the Spaniards – begged them to visit him in Cempoala. Cortés accepted and lived to bless the day. The Fat Cacique became his first and greatest ally.

The Burning of the Boats

After that events came thick and fast. Five arrogant ambassadors from Moctezuma arrived to scold the Fat Cacique for befriending Cortés, and demanded twenty sacrificial victims to erase the affront. Cortés prevailed on his host to take the Aztecs as prisoners and give them a sound thrashing. "The act was so astonishing," Bernal tells us, "that they said it must be the work of *teules*, which means gods or demons," a name which stuck to the Spaniards. The same night, Cortés himself freed two of the prisoners and sent them off to Moctezuma as living proof of his good faith.



The Cempoalans were terrified of the possible consequences of their actions. Cortés promised to defend them if they would swear fealty to Charles V, which they immediately did. The Fat Cacique then offered Cortés a fat princess, his own niece, as a bride, and seven other maidens for his men. Cortés accepted on one condition, that the Cempoalans abjure their idols, forbid the prostitution of boys dressed as women, and accept Christ as their Lord. (Another Totonac custom was to get drunk by means of *pulque* enemas, a filthy habit, though perhaps the least objectionable way of taking pulque.) The Fat Cacique and the priests agreed to see what could be done about sodomy, but on no account would they give up their gods. At this, Cortés and his men swarmed up the pyramids and demolished their idols while the Cempoalans cowered below in terror. When nothing happened – the sun went on shining, the earth did not swallow them up – the Cempoalans recovered their spirits and embraced the Spaniards affectionately.

News from Cuba reached Cortés in Cempoala. Velázquez was in a fury. He was trying to bring influence to bear on the Spanish court. Hearing this, Velázquez's friends plotted to desert Cortés and steal away on one of the ships. It was then, faced with the possibility of defection, that Cortés "burned his boats," in the traditional phrase, though in fact he only ran them aground and dismantled their rigging.

The Spaniards left Cempoala in August, 1519. They could move more easily now; the Fat Cacique had provided them with many bearers. They climbed up toward the central plateau by way of Jalapa. The intense cold was something they had not foreseen. In Xocatlán, a city loyal to the Aztecs, they found "more than one hundred thousand skulls" neatly piled in the temple square. The local Cacique tried to make Cortés turn back by describing the greatness and power of Moctezuma. But his descriptions of Moctezuma's treasure only made the Spaniards forget their cold and hunger in their eagerness to reach Tenochtitlán.

The Tlaxcalan Campaign

The independent seigniory of Tlaxcala, correctly described by the Cempoalans as the principal enemy of the Aztec Empire, proved to be every bit as hostile to the Spaniards. Having successfully resisted all Aztec attempts to conquer them, they had

no intention of surrendering their independence to others. "There were so many warriors that they could have blinded us just with fistfuls of earth," said Bernal. They fought rather more cleverly than that, giving battle in such broken terrain that the Spaniards' horses were of little use. They killed a mare to show that the horses were not immortal. In short, they set about disproving the Spanish teules' supposed divinity. Several inconclusive battles took place before the Tlaxcalans sued for peace.

News of the Spanish victory over the hitherto undefeated Tlaxcalans flashed across the land. Five Aztec nobles immediately appeared in Cortés's camp. Aside from the usual gifts, they brought dire warnings of the Tlaxcalans' treachery, and the surprising news that Moctezuma was willing to submit to Charles V and send him yearly tribute providing that the Spaniards stayed away from Tenochtitlán.

The Tlaxcalan elders, for their part, begged him to visit their city. They provided 500 bearers for his cannon and calmed his suspicions by offering themselves and their families as hostages. Cortés finally accepted and Tlaxcala received the Spaniards with a joyful celebration. The Tlaxcalans offered their noblest maidens to the Spaniards. As in Cempoala, Cortés refused unless they agreed to abjure their idols and adopt Christianity. Being more spirited than the Cempoalans, the Tlaxcalans refused so energetically that the Mercedarian chaplain advised Cortés to let them be.

The most Cortés was able to achieve for the time being was the use of a newly whitewashed temple for the Virgin Mary and the christening of the Tlaxcalan princesses, who were given such peninsular names as doña Luisa and doña Elvira and then parceled out to his captains. Cortés destroyed the cages where men and women were being fattened for sacrifice, as he did afterwards in every town he entered.

A tug-of-war now ensued between Moctezuma's ambassadors and the Tlaxcalan elders. Each sought to win Cortés's trust. Moctezuma, fearing an alliance between Spaniards and Tlaxcalans, sought to effect a separation as soon as possible. He proffered a courtly invitation to Tenochtitlán and suggested that Cortés take the road through Cholula, where he and his men would be well looked after. The Tlaxcalans told him it was a trap. He should take the road through Huejotzingo, a town held by loyal friends and allies.

After much deliberation, Cortés chose the road through Cholula. The Tlaxcalans, though hurt by this sign of mistrust, offered an escort of ten thousand men, assuring him that he would need them. Cortés accepted only one thousand.

Cholula was a beautiful city of towers and temples. It was the sacred city of Anáhuac, and the Tlaxcalans refused to enter it. Cortés and his captains were lodged in a palace with a large courtyard, but shortly after their arrival they saw that they had indeed been tricked by Moctezuma. They were provided with firewood and water, but no food. Nor did the local chieftain appear to welcome them. More ambassadors arrived from Moctezuma, now insolently ordering Cortés to go no further. The Tlaxcalans sent word that 20,000 warriors were deployed in the countryside to slaughter the Spaniards. Doña Marina, talking to an old Cholulan woman, confirmed the rumor. The Cholulans had even sacrificed seven Indians to assure the success of their plans.

Cortés lost no time. He announced to the Cholulans that he was leaving early the next morning and would need 2,000 porters to accompany him to Tenochtitlán. The Cholulan nobles, priests and warriors were laughing, Bernal says, when they gathered in the forecourt of Cortés's palace the following morning. Their glee vanished when Cortés, interpreted by Aguilar and Marina, spoke to them from astride his horse. He itemized the details of their plot against him, mentioning even the pots of salt, chili peppers and tomatoes waiting for the flesh of the twenty live Spaniards who were to be sacrificed in a ceremony of thanksgiving. He upbraided them for their treacherous

methods. The priests and caciques admitted the truth of these accusations, adding that they were merely obeying their lord Moctezuma. After hearing their confession, Cortés gave the signal. A shot was fired, and the slaughter began. Musket and cannon were emptied into the ranks of the Cholulans. The killing spread through the city, and temples and towers were set on fire. The carnage, fuelled by the Tlaxcalans' ancient enmity to the Cholulans, was so atrocious, that Cortés had to intercede in their favor. When a semblance of order was restored, Cortés pronounced his usual homily to the Indians, ordered the town to be whitewashed, and set up a cross as proof of the impotence of the Mexican idols before the power of the Christian God. After Cholula, there could be no further doubt about Moctezuma's intentions.

The fact that the Spaniards were obviously mortals and not teules had not entirely dispelled the idea that Cortés might still be Quetzalcóatl's avatar. After all, the Plumed Serpent in his time had also appeared in human guise. Now, as Cortés approached the valley of Anáhuac, a comet appeared and flared nightly above Tenochtitlán; while Popocatépetl spouted a vertical column of black smoke.

When the Spaniards crossed the pass between the volcanoes and descended toward the city on the lagoon, Moctezuma yielded to his fate. He donned his fine cotton cloak, his gem-studded sandals, his tiara of gold and, accompanied by the noblest lords of the realm, he walked to receive Cortés, begging him to enter and rest himself and take possession of his city.

The Neighboring Republic of Yucatán: the States of Yucatán, Campeche and Quintana Roo

Mexicans affectionately refer to the whole of the Yucatán peninsula as "The Neighboring Republic of Yucatán," though it now comprises the three separate states of Yucatán, Campeche and Quintana Roo (pronounced "raw"). To the traveler, until very recently, it suggested Mayan ruins and the charming "white city" of Mérida.

Roads are a recent development in Yucatán. In 1865, when the Empress Carlota decided to visit Uxmal, she had to ride all the way out from Mérida on a mule. Now a network of paved roads has made the archeological centers easily accessible, as well as the iridescent beaches of Quintana Roo. The traveler can drive from the posh seaside resort of Cancún to that most poetic of Mayan ruins, the seaside temple of Tulúm perched on a cliff above the many-colored Caribbean. If so inclined, he can continue southward to the Guatemalan border or cut west across the jungles to the walled city of Campeche on the Gulf side, and to the oil platforms of Ciudad del Carmen. He can bathe in magical lagoons along the way or watch the chewing gum trees grow, for this southern jungle of Yucatán is the source of most of the *chicle* chewed in the world today. The chico zapote (*Achras zapota*), or sapodilla tree, grows forty to fifty feet high, has glossy small leaves and the most delicious fruit imaginable. The chewing-gum is made from the rubbery latex drawn from its trunk. Chewing chicle has been a Mayan habit since prehistoric times.

How chewing gum got from Chichén to Chicago makes a curious story. When General Santa Anna was defeated in San Jacinto, he was held prisoner in Washington. The young officer detailed to keep a watch on him observed that he was constantly chewing something that he never swallowed. He asked what it was and Santa Anna offered him a piece from a small loaf he carried in his pocket. The officer found the chewing so pleasant that he decided to share the pleasure with the rest of the American people.

Campeche (from the Maya, *kam*, snake, and *pech*, tick – not an inviting place name) provided the door through which the Spaniards finally entered and conquered Yucatán. The east and north coasts of the peninsula proved impregnable. Montejo the

Younger, a son of one of Cortés's captains, was left with the task of colonizing the area after his father had given up in despair; he first fortified himself in Tabasco and, when he had achieved the necessary strength, launched his ultimately successful assault on the Mayan bastions of the peninsula.

From the beginning, a bitter rivalry existed between the fortified port of Campeche and the island city of Mérida. The *campechanos* resented the political domination of the northern city. Being the doorway to the peninsula, Campeche had to withstand the constant attacks of pirates during colonial times and, after Independence, even an attack from Santa Anna's navy in 1843. After much political maneuvering and a genocidal struggle between the Mayas and the rest of the population, Campeche finally achieved statehood in 1858.

Quintana Roo, on the eastern flank of the peninsula, did not become a state until 1974, though the federal government had separated it in 1902 from Yucatán, whose government had proved unable to cope with the sporadic and fierce rebellions in the area, where most of the unsubdued Mayas of the War of the Castes had taken refuge.

The modern state of Yucatán has thus been reduced to a triangular territory of calcareous rock, sinkholes and Mayan ruins in the north of the peninsula. It has consolations, though. Quintana Roo can boast of Cancún, Tulum and Cozumel; Campeche, of its precious woods and offshore oil, but Yucatán has kept its character and its people, the ineffable *yucatecos*.

Physically and culturally they form a race apart. Though descended from the Maya, they did not inherit the elegantly tapered profiles preserved in classic Mayan art. The likeliest explanation of the difference is that classic art portrayed princes, priests and warriors of high breeding, whose heads were artificially shaped from birth to an ideal standard of beauty. Babies' heads were banded soon after birth to produce the characteristic elongation of the profile, while a bead of turquoise or jade was placed on one side of the bridge of the nose to tease the baby's eye inwards. However strange this description may sound, the results were stunningly beautiful, as may be seen in the carved heads of Palenque and Copán, or the clay statuettes of Jaina. This beauty did not, however, denote any great degree of amiability, which is the essential trait of the present day yucateco. When other regional stereotypes are discussed, their more notable defects are pointed out along with their virtues. Thus the diligent and devout *poblano* (from Puebla) is thought hypocritical; the cheery and entertaining *jarocho* (from Veracruz) can be coarse; the *regiomontano* (from Monterrey) an admirable citizen, and empire-builder, is stingier than a Scot; the *tapatío*, from Jalisco, is one hell of a guy, but carries the macho chip on his shoulder at all times; the *norteño*, from the northern border states is as open-handed as he is open minded, but an inverted snob, proud to be a bronco. Only the yucateco has escaped invidious classification. His countrymen readily agree that he is bright, slightly nutty, and totally sympathetic.

But the phrase "The Neighboring Republic of Yucatán" is not a joke. It is a historical fact. Yucatán – the whole peninsula – did at one time secede from Mexico to form an independent state. The War of the Castes, in 1847, coincided with the Mexican-American War. The savagery of the Mayan rebels, who aimed at the extermination of all the Creoles and Mestizos in Yucatán, was unparalleled.

Yucatán, in 1839, had already seceded, and, now Mexico being at war, no help could be expected from that quarter. Desperate appeals were sent from Mérida and Campeche to Washington, London, even Spain, vainly offering the sovereignty of Yucatán to whichever government would provide immediate military aid. The rebels were at the same time getting arms and rum from the English in Belize, so it was not very realistic to solicit help from London. Only the coming of the rains put an end to this first and most violent onslaught of the War of the Castes. The rebels went back to

plant their fields before taking up arms again. By that time, peace had been re-established between the United States and Mexico (1848), and the central government was able to send Yucatán help against the rebels. As a result of this, Yucatán finally and definitively joined the republic.

Yucatán's offer of its sovereignty to foreign powers is not as disloyal as it seems. It, after all, had little reason to consider itself part of Mexico. Yucatán was not conquered by Cortés but by the Spanish Crown. Its close political links with Mexico dated only from 1821. Given its history, Yucatán developed a strongly independent, therefore federalist, spirit. When Mexico became monolithically centralist between 1835 and 1846, Yucatán rebelled and, following the example of Texas, broke relations with the central government in 1839.

The War of the Castes lasted long after 1848, though it never again came so near to winning its objective. About two-thirds of the population of Yucatán perished in the initial years of the war. The surviving rebels retreated to the south-eastern jungles, where they continued to receive rum and bad advice from the British. They refused to sign a truce with the government of Yucatán, declaring they would govern themselves according to their ancient customs. They did, however, promise not to attack the Creoles. They had given Queen Victoria their word and they intended to keep it.

The Twine Binder and the Agave

The agricultural revolution that took place in the United States after the Civil War sparked a movement of intensive mechanization, which was to benefit a Yucatán drained of men and resources by the War of the Castes.

In 1875, George Appleby invented the twine binder for use with the machine harvested cereals. The demand for binder twine was enormous. Its supply was found in the *henequén* agave, which grew wild in Yucatán, thriving on its poor soil despite drought and neglect. After 1875, vast plantations of henequén were grown throughout the peninsula. (Since the twine was shipped out of the port of Sisal, this became the generic name for any agave fiber.)

The sisal boom and the great haciendas coincided with Porfirio Díaz's long and generally peaceful dictatorship. The sisal fortunes created an atmosphere of prosperity in the cities and of European luxury in the town houses of the hacendados. Things went swimmingly until 1900, when prosperity ended as suddenly as it had begun. The International Harvester Corporation formed a trust and quickly beat down the price of sisal by stopping all purchases. The planting of henequén lost all interest for the growers. In any case, the Revolution took the decision out of their hands in 1910. The Agrarian Reform parceled out the haciendas to the peasants who had neither the capital nor the time to cultivate the slow-growing agave. Seeking the advantages of a monopolistic control, President Cárdenas created the Gran Ejido Henequenero to control the national supply of sisal fiber, but the bureaucrats who managed it simply got rich while the ejidatario languished. World War II gave the moribund industry a brief boost, but the invention of synthetic fibers finally killed it. In 1955 the Gran Ejido was liquidated and the twine industry became a state monopoly.

So the state of Yucatán, which once lorded it over the entire province, is now the poor relation living on subsidies from the federal government. The islands and beaches of Quintana Roo have become international tourist attractions.

Torrents of chicle continue to bubble out of its southern jungles. Campeche has oil, shrimp fisheries and cattle. Yucatán, like an impoverished aristocrat, has kept its pedigree and its traditions, the underground lagoons and sacred grottoes, the richest ruins and the poorest lands. And, of course, the ineffable yucatecos.

How It Happened

From the time of its wholly imaginary but perfectly legal founding by Cortés, Veracruz has been the foremost port of Mexico. For more than a century it remained Europe's only door to the New World.

Before long, Veracruz became Europe's door to the Orient as well. The Philippines – the real Indies Columbus had looked for but missed – had been clearly placed on European maps since Magellan discovered them in 1521. Contrary winds, however, had made trade impossible between them and New Spain until the discovery, in the 1560's, of the easy, though roundabout, return route – north to Japan, thence east to California, and down the coast to San Blas and Acapulco. The Manila Galleon brought silks, porcelain, ivory and spices, which the powerful merchant-shippers from Mexico City and Puebla sent on to Spain through Veracruz. Thus the establishment of the overland Veracruz-Acapulco link finally provided the long sought European route to the Orient.

In 1522, Cortés imported a lot of sugar cane from the Canary Islands and built an *ingenio* – a sugar mill – in the fertile hinterland of Veracruz. The industry prospered but the Indians collapsed. Negro slaves were brought in from the Caribbean islands. They survived in their new occupation and multiplied so rapidly that in 1602 they were strong enough to stage a rebellion and escape from their Spanish owners. In 1609, the Crown recognized the justice of their cause, granted them liberty and a tract of land where they founded the town of San Lorenzo de los Negros, now called Yanga after their original rebel leader.

The Pirate Problem

The silver strike of Zacatecas in 1548 made Veracruz the most tempting morsel for privateers in the New World. Millions in bullion were sometimes stored there, waiting to be picked up by the Spanish fleet. There were pirates of every nationality, but historical circumstances favored those who sought the protection of the English, Dutch or French sovereigns, Spain's traditional enemies. These were outraged at Pope Alexander VI's presumption in splitting the newly discovered lands of Africa, India and the New World between Spain and Portugal. It became a matter of honor to arm and license corsairs for the purpose of acquiring a share in the wealth of the New World. In New Spain, the cities of Campeche and Veracruz were the main targets. The depredations of John Hawkins and Francis Drake in the 1570's and of the Dutchman – Laurent de Graff – "Lorencillo" a century later, obliged Spain to build fortifications around these towns. The walls of Campeche are still standing, as are those of San Juan de Ulua, both equally useless.

The Hacienda - AID Project setting is a hacienda

When Fanny and her husband visited General Santa Anna, she called his estate a *quinta*, or country house, though it comprised 900 square miles. She could not know, so soon after her arrival, that such estates were known as "haciendas" in Mexico, nor could she yet imagine the importance of the role the hacienda had played in the development of the country.

The principal precursor of the hacienda, the encomienda, appeared in the first years after the Conquest. In theory, the Spanish encomendero, or beneficiary of the encomienda, undertook all responsibility for the Indians in his charge, indoctrinating them in the Christian religion and protecting them from their enemies. His native encomendados, in turn, were obliged to work for him a certain number of days a week. Since the encomendero was usually a soldier avid for riches, not converts, the relationship easily degenerated and the encomendero himself became the worst

enemy of the Indian he was supposed to protect.

The missionaries abominated the encomienda. They agitated violently in support of the Indians, even taking their cause to the Council of the Indies and the King himself. The Crown eventually paid heed and promulgated the New Laws of 1542, legally abolishing the encomienda. Despite the howl set up by the encomenderos, the Crown slowly but surely deprived them of all their *de facto* privileges. A royal decree of 1591 declared all land in New Spain to be Crown property. They could however, purchase the land from the Crown if they wished to obtain clear title. After 1615, all lands lacking proper title were auctioned off. By 1648, most properties had been legalized and the ex-encomendero or his descendants could take full possession of their lands. It was these properties that became the first haciendas.

Land, however, was practically worthless without the Indians' free labor, so the landowners devised a means of nailing down the native population. Playing on the Indians' innocence in money matters, the hacendado extended credit to his peons in the hacienda's commissary – the *tienda de raya* – far beyond the peon's ability to pay. Since he could not legally leave his employer while owing him money, this practice inevitably resulted in a system of serfdom through debt. Such debts were passed on from father to son. Eventually, the peon and his family became part of the hacienda's inventory and their debt was included in the purchase price of the hacienda. Though manifestly unjust, the system proved remarkably stable. The government of the New World colonies was an intermittent affair at best. Communications between Spain and New Spain lagged from two to four years behind events. Matters had to be decided on the spot by the strongest man around, who was frequently the hacendado. As lord of the manor, he had *de facto* jurisdiction over his peons.

The hacienda was taking its definitive form about 1630, when the first silver boom was petering out. The failure of the mines plunged the country into a severe depression. Bands of marauders preyed upon the countryside, driving the independent peasant to seek protection either in the nearest town or the nearest hacienda. Many sold their holdings to powerful hacendados and went to live within the hacienda walls. The hacienda thus became the unit of survival for the rural population during the seventeenth century. Every hacienda became self-sufficient, with bakeries, founderies, carpentry and leather shops, stables, dairies and sheep runs. In the pulque and cattle haciendas of the central plateau and the north it was said that the only things that they did not produce were salt, sugar and coffee. In Veracruz, with its giant haciendas extending from the coast to the mountains, the hacendados theoretically could produce everything, especially salt, sugar and coffee.

When money from the second silver bonanza began flowing again in the course of the eighteenth century, the hacienda reached the peak of its prosperity. Countless impressive *cascos* – hacienda compounds – appeared in the Mexican countryside, with churches ranging in style from the Plateresque simplicity of the Renaissance to the splendid ornamentation of the Churrigueresque Baroque and eventually Neo-Gothic.

The mainly agrarian character of the 1910 Revolution virtually brought about the end of the hacienda system, though miraculously a few haciendas have managed to survive from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries to the present day. Others have gained a new lease on life as hotels and *paradors*, like the splendid caseo of Galindo, near Querétaro. And still others are now true quintas – the country houses of the rich of today.

Jalapa (Náhuatl: *xalli*, sand, *apan*, river)

The famous hinterland cities of Veracruz developed like the hill stations of India as a refuge from the "black vomit" (yellow fever), cholera, malaria, and dysentery of

MEXICO
An Endless Journey.

MÉRIDA and the MUNDO MAYA

Excursions

Visitors can easilty divide a Mérida visit into three areas of concentration.

- First is the graceful and gregarious City of Mérida.
- Second is the irresistible excursion to Chichén Itzá.
- Third is a full-day excursion to the south to the great Mayan city of Uxmal, and its satellite ceremonial centers of Sayil, Labná, and Kabah.

A recommended Mérida itinerary allows 2-3 days for city exploration and another 3-5 days to see the ruins. Many visitors use Merida as their home base, though lodging is available at Chichén Itzá and Uxmal. In all cases, excellent day trips are available upon arrival.....

- **Mayaland Tours:** (99) 25-21-33
- **Ceiba Tours:** (99) 24-44-77.

Mérida

Though the city's population is approaching 1 million, Mérida is compact and easily explored on foot. There are over a dozen ground operators offering half-day city tours that take in museums, parks, and monuments. Most exploration starts at the zócalo, described below. (Note that all east-west streets carry even numbered names, while north-south streets carry odd numbered names.)

Downtown Mérida

The heart of the city is the imposing and well-tended Plaza Mayor. The plaza is surrounded by fine example of colonial architecture. Its wheel and spokes layout, S-shaped wrought iron benches (known as confidenciales) and carefully manicured hedges invite visitors to stroll and linger beneath the plaza's ancient laurel trees. Surrounding the Plaza are four buildings of interest.

- Catedral de San Idelfonso:

  On the plaza's eastern side. Built between 1561-98, the imposing fortress-like, twin spired structure was build from stones of a demolished Mayan temple. It is one of Mexico's oldest churches. The city's most holy object, a statue known as Cristo de las Ampollas is housed here.

- Palacio de Gobierno:

On the north side. Not to be missed are the vibrant murals - over 25 years in the making - by Fernando Pacheco depicting Yucatán history.

- Palacio Municipal:

  On the square's western flank. This building dates originally to 1542 (refurbished in 1733 and 1855) and is noted for its handsome clock tower.

Another of the zócalo's premier attractions is the Casa de Montejo, the former home of the Montejo family, and now a bank branch. Note the interesting bas-relief on the facade depicting Montejo (the founder of Merida) standing atop the heads of the conquered Mayans.

Other downtown points of interest are the University of Yucatán (founded in 1618), La Ermita de Santa Isabel (a pretty 18th century church with lovely gardens) the Teatro Peón Contreras (a splendid theater of neo-classic Italian design), the Museum of Popular Art (devoted to exquisite Yucatecan arts & crafts) and the Parque Centenario (with its charming zoo and miniature train).

There are also several quaint parks within a few blocks of the zócalo, including Plaza Santa Lucia (frequent cultural events), Parque Hidalgo, and Plaza de la Madre.

Paseo Montejo

Many of Mérida's colonial treasures stretch along stately Paseo Montejo, an eight-block tree-lined boulevard modeled after the Champs Elysées. Its French, Italian and Spanish-Moorish mansions and chalets (some of which are now restaurants and shops) are stately reminders of the city's opulent past. It is one of Mexico's most bizarre attractions. Do not miss the massive Canton Palace, an Italian Renaissance-style building and former residence to Yucatán governors. It now houses the fine Museum of Anthropology and Natural History. The museum houses fascinating Mayan artifacts including exquisite pottery and sculptures.

Chichén Itzá

Mighty Chichén Itzá is one of the largest and best maintained sites in Mexico, and is a joy to visit. It is actually two cities, one that was ruled by the Mayans during the sixth to the tenth century, the other a Toltec-Mayan city that emerged around the year 1000 a.d. Most of the prominent buildings were developed during the city's "rebirth" under Toltec rule.

The towering Castillo displays a mixture of Toltec and Mayan influences, and is fraught with cosmological symbolism. Its four sides contain 365 steps (depicting the solar year), 52 panels (for each year in the Mayan century), and 18 terraces (for the eighteen months in the religious year). There is an interesting temple inside the Castillo, accessible via a narrow stairway. The enormous ball court is the largest ever discovered, and is lined with fascinating carvings.

The site also contains a cenote, or sacred well, an Observatory, the imposing Temple of Warriors, and the Nunnery, along with dozens of other fascinating structures. Not to be missed! Count on spending at least an entire day here.

During the Fall and Spring Equinox (March and September) the sun's shadow forms an enormous serpents body on the face of the pyramid know as "El Castillo." Quite a sight!

There are several full-day excursions, costing around $40 per person.

Overnight lodging in Chichén Itzá

Merida -A Pleasure to Visit

This fascinating inland city of approximately 700,000 people is the capital of the state of Yucatan. The city itself is full of charm with the colorful horse-drawn carriages or *calandrias,* which take you, for a fee, through narrow streets (all with numbers instead of names!) for a leisurely view of many interesting places that you will want to explore more fully.

You will be treated warmly by the friendly, handsome people of Merida who often bear the features typical of their long Mayan ancestry (easily recognizable by their almond shaped eyes, high cheek bones and very straight hair).

While you are in Merida you should be sure to spend time in the *Zócalo* (main square), called the *Plaza de la Independencia,* where you will be treated to folk dancing, lively musical performances, vendors selling a variety of beautiful native crafts, and of course, it is always a pleasure to "people-watch".

Merida has several museums worth seeing, namely, the Museum of Popular Art where examples of Yucatecan art are exhibited, The Cantón Place (or Museum of Anthropology and History) is also of interest, as well as the Home Museum of Instruments which displays original musical instruments of the pre-Hispanic era along with popular present day instruments. Your sightseeing should include the Cathedral, a stately twin-towered church located east of the plaza, and the Casa de Montejo and the Government Palace, all of which have historical and architectural significance.

Tourists are encouraged to take a carriage ride through beautiful Paseo de Montejo, a boulevard lined with trees where you will see a variety of architecture represented in the lovely mansions of French, Italian and Spanish-Moorish design.

These beautiful homes were built by the 19th century settlers who became vastly wealthy by making use of the hardy fibrous plants (henequen) which they harvested and used for making rope. Later these plants were also used for many other items such as door mats and hammocks.

While riding through Paseo de Montejo you will come to the Monumento de la Patria, sometimes referred to as the Monument to the Flag. This is a large semi-circle sculpture made of rose colored stone depicting the history of Mexico. Take time to appreciate this interesting piece of art.

Many people are attracted to Merida because of its easy accessibility to the famous Mayan ruins such as Chichen Itza, Dzibilchaltun and Uxmal, which are around 80 miles east of Merida. Also nearby are the Balankanchin Caves where there is an altar containing carved stone offerings left by the Mayans 800 years ago.

As you will discover, Merida has much to offer and you will spend days exploring this interesting city, another fascinating insight to the history of Mexico.

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WOMEN IN MEXICO

HISTORY AND BACKGROUND

- In 1915, General Salvador Alvarado, then governor of Yucatan, summons the First Feminist Conference. He gives strong support to women's rights. During his time in office, he legislates family relations issues, makes divorce accessible to women and gives them a forum to discuss their social and political condition.

- 75 years ago, in 1922 in the state of Yucatan, then governor Felipe Carillo Puerto, sends an initiative to the State Legislature that grants the vote to women. Rosa Torres takes the position of the first council in Merida City Hall. The Mexican division of the Panamerican League of Women summons the First National Feminist Conference.

- In 1928 President Plutarco Elias Calles makes women's equality the law of the land.

- 1991 Dulce Maria Sauri named interim governor of the state of Yucatan.

President Zedillo, in en effort to eliminate gender inequalities in Mexican society, presents "Alianza para la Igualdad (Alliance for Equality) Programa Nacional de la Mujer" [Pronam] National Commission of Women on March 8, 1996. The goals of this project are to reach total and full equality of men and women.

President Zedillo appoints Dulce Maria Sauri, ex-governor of Yucatan, as head of the Commission on Women. She reports significant progress in participation of women in Mexico's development. One sign of progress is in the Congress and Senate, where 14.5% of the legislators are women. But much work remains to be done for women's rights.

On January 17, 1997 in an opening ceremony of the "Centro de Atención al Maltrato Intrafamiliar y Sexual" (Center of Attention to Family and Sexual Abuse) of Mexico state, Sauri reports that between 1990 and 1996, 500,000 women have been victims of abuse.

She reports that violence against women is a great obstacle to democratic progress. She provides data from the Commission's research that estimates that 70% of women who live with a male companion have been victims of some kind of domestic violence. She points out that this has long-lasting ill effects on families.

On March 9, 1997 Dulce Maria Sauri Riancho, gives President Zedillo a report from the Commission on Women in a ceremony commemorating International Women's Day. The report concludes that women in Mexico are doing better than in the past but many unacceptable conditions remain.

[In Mexico City or the state of Nuevo Leon (north part of the country), the level of fertility is 2.11 and 2.2 children per woman respectively, while in Oaxaca, Chiapas, Guerrero and Puebla the level is and average of 3.3 children. Similarly, in Baja California, only 4.5% of women older than 15 yrs. are illiterate, while in Guerrero its 28% and in Chiapas is 32.7%.]

Sauri and the Commision have been instrumental in beginning to establish women's centers throughout Mexico -- especially in depressed city areas, the countryside and indiginous communities-- where women can go to get help for problems including domestic violence and illness.

They have recommended the following program of action.

Goals of the Commission on Women

- Overcome the educational backlogs and improve educational opportunities of women.
- Guarantee access for women to comprehensive health care services.
- Strengthen the capabilities of women and promote their participation in all levels and decision making environments.

•Defend and protect women's rights.

•Prevent and eliminate violence against women.

•Combat poverty afflicting women.

- Support working women: workers' rights and the development of micro and small companies run by women.
- Provide a more equal distribution of domestic and non-domestic tasks and responsibilities between men and women.
- Acknowledge and appreciate the contribution made by work not paid of women for the economy and welfare of family.

•Eliminate stereotypical images of women.

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USAID Supports Economic Empowerment for the World's Poor Through Microfinance

Microenterprise development, providing credit and economic opportunity to the disenfranchised poor, helps ensure that the benefits of economic growth are available to all. The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) has been the lead donor for microenterprise programs since the early 1980s. Its funding currently provides support for more than 150 institutions in 40 countries.

USAID's Microenterprise Initiative launched in 1994 has recently been renewed. The Initiative, affirmed by members of congress, has been effective in ensuring the growth of microenterprise activities that bring poor disadvantaged and marginalized groups into the mainstream of an expanding economy. USAID has targeted $120 million a year for 1996 and 1997 for microenterprise projects.

Microfinance is an integral element of microenterprise development because it allows poor individuals, often without collateral or an avenue to commercial banks, access to financial services. These loans will be used to finance entrepreneurial activities such as establishing a vending cart or buying equipment for a small manufacturing operation.

USAID-supported microenterprise projects have had tremendous success throughout the world.

- Technical assistance of $15 million from USAID to Bank Rakyat in Indonesia (BRI) in the early 1980's has lead to the development of a profitable state owned bank that serves the poor. Today BRI attracts savings from 13 million Indonesians and lends to more than 2 million entrepreneurs.

- USAID contributed $5.9 million for the start-up investment in BancoSol in Bolivia. Today the bank reaches over 60,000 clients and has no need for further subsidy.

- In cooperation with the government and private institutions, USAID's work in Uganda to increase financial services to rural businesses will reach over 10,000 people.

- In South Africa, Get Ahead, with early support from USAID, has reached 10,000 clients.

- USAID microenterprise funding of $6 million in Ecuador supports programs that will be able to reach 138,000 clients between 1996-99.

- In Nicaragua, USAID support for ACCION, Catholic Relief Services, Opportunity International, FINCA and Pro Mujer will result in the provision of financial services for 51,000 clients of whom 80 percent are women.

-- more --

Frequently less than $300, microloans are sometimes guarenteed by peer lending groups. Insured by the borrower's community, the repayment rate is often better than 95 percent.

Overall, approximately two thirds of the clients of micro-enterprise institutions supported by USAID are women. Beginning with a loan of as little as $50, poor women can begin the process of escaping from poverty. With time and on-going access to financial services, clients may expand their economic activities, educate their children or invest in housing.

Microenterprise is rapidly emerging as an important tool in our efforts to alleviate poverty for some people in our own country. In the past few years the microenterprise movement has grown to include over 400 institutions across the United States.

USAID plays a leadership role with other donors. It was key in establishing a multi-donor group of microenterprise organizations, the Consultative Group to Assist the Poorest, which uses proven methods as standards for micro-finance programs.

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