

*Mayan World*

**México**

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The word 'México' is rendered in a stylized, multi-colored font. Each letter is filled with a different color and contains a unique pattern: 'M' is red with a Greek key pattern; 'é' is pink with a floral pattern; 'x' is yellow with a sunburst pattern; 'i' is purple with a vertical line pattern; 'c' is green with a circular pattern; and 'o' is blue with a wavy pattern. A small pink diamond shape is positioned above the 'é'.

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*Ancient Mayan civilization* is recognized throughout the world, above all for its precise mathematical calculations; knowledge that has transcended time and that can still be seen in its perfect structures and complex calendar.

The southeast of Mexico—the states of Campeche, Chiapas, Quintana Roo, Tabasco and Yucatán—is the principal area for discovering the Mayan World. These states were witnesses to the birth of the grandeur, knowledge and splendor of this millennia-old culture, and to this day they are home to priceless heritage that visitors must experience at least once in their lives. From approximately 2000 BC to 1546 AD, the Mayans shaped a civilization whose architectural forms are the most tangible part of Mexico's ancient heritage, and to this day, enormous palaces, richly detailed murals, imposing ceremonial centers and the ruins of grand cities remain. Every discovery in southeast Mexico sheds light on the depth of the Mayans' scientific and astronomical knowledge and confirms what we already knew: that Mayan society achieved greatness in ways that few other civilizations have.

Secrets that lie within pyramids and temples, in the depths of the jungle, in the beauty of its streets and in the warmth of its people are a genuine source of pride to Mexico and every Mexican. Thus as always, the *Mundo Maya* opens its doors to receive any and all who look for surprises and adventure in the place where Mayan civilization still dazzles.

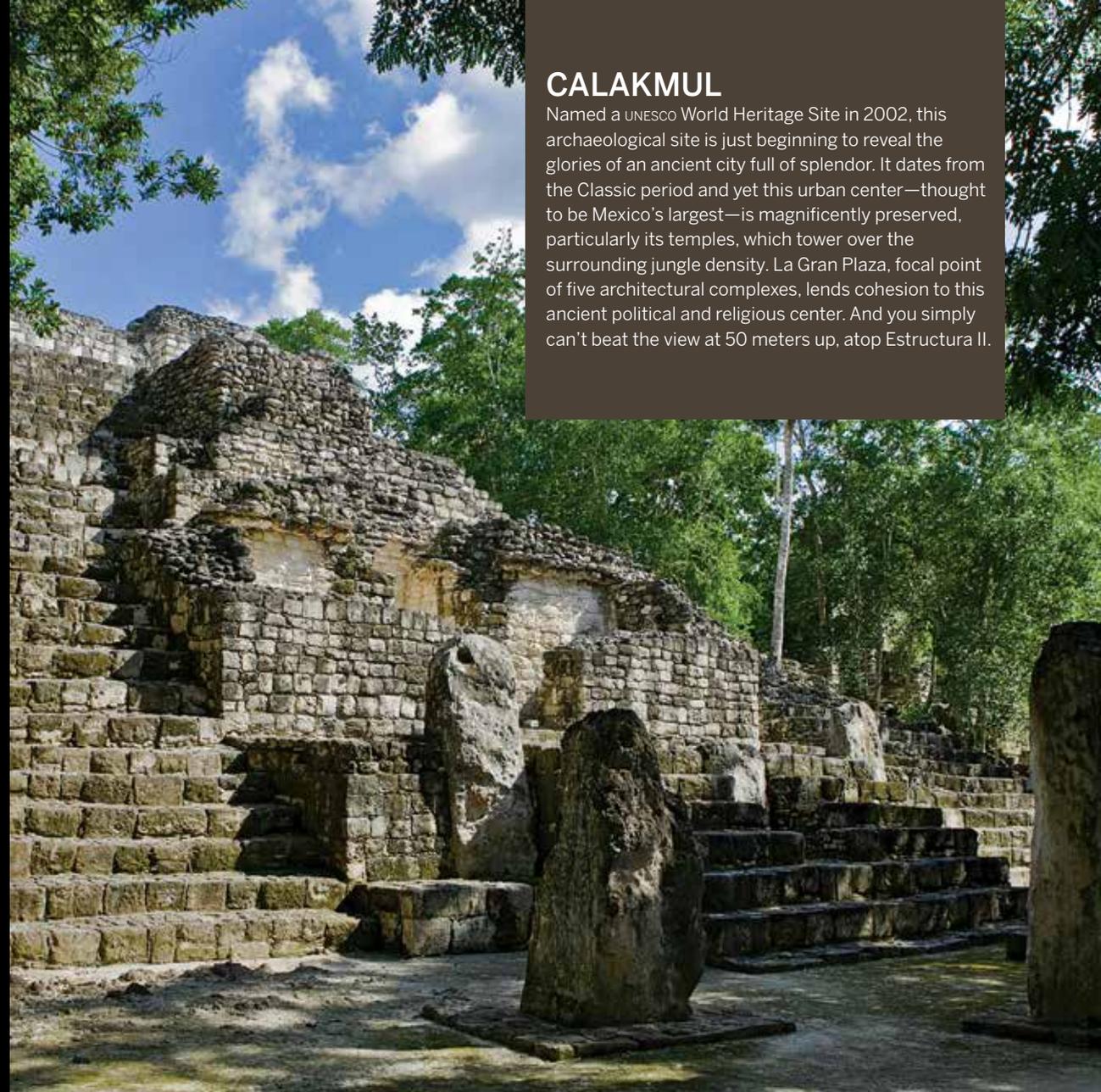
# CAMPECHE

Featuring some of the region's most beautiful coasts, jungles and cenotes, as well as a strong colonial influence, the state of Campeche, along with its capital, seems protected by a wall that safeguards it from time's passing. Traces of Mayan culture discovered here date from the mid-pre-Classic period, an epoch that witnessed important advances in agricultural development and ceramics techniques. It was during the Classic period that many surviving structures were developed; they have made Campeche one of the very best destinations for discovering the *Mundo Maya*.

The residents of the state's eleven municipal jurisdictions, heirs to mestizo tradition and known throughout Mexico for their hospitality, also hold the secrets to traditional cuisines that center on seafood delicacies like *cazón* fish and shrimp.

## CALAKMUL

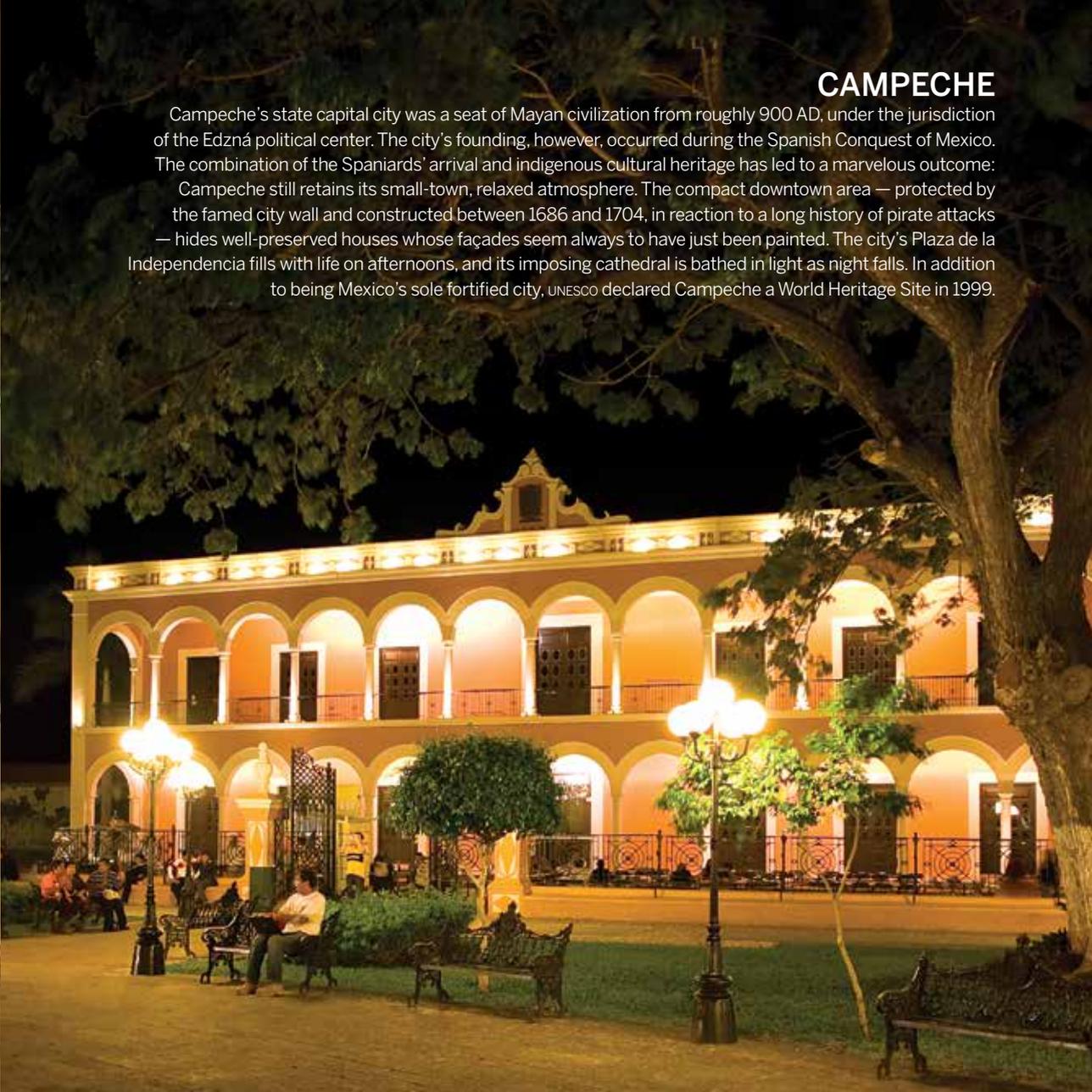
Named a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2002, this archaeological site is just beginning to reveal the glories of an ancient city full of splendor. It dates from the Classic period and yet this urban center—thought to be Mexico's largest—is magnificently preserved, particularly its temples, which tower over the surrounding jungle density. La Gran Plaza, focal point of five architectural complexes, lends cohesion to this ancient political and religious center. And you simply can't beat the view at 50 meters up, atop Estructura II.





## CAMPECHE

Campeche's state capital city was a seat of Mayan civilization from roughly 900 AD, under the jurisdiction of the Edzná political center. The city's founding, however, occurred during the Spanish Conquest of Mexico. The combination of the Spaniards' arrival and indigenous cultural heritage has led to a marvelous outcome: Campeche still retains its small-town, relaxed atmosphere. The compact downtown area — protected by the famed city wall and constructed between 1686 and 1704, in reaction to a long history of pirate attacks — hides well-preserved houses whose façades seem always to have just been painted. The city's Plaza de la Independencia fills with life on afternoons, and its imposing cathedral is bathed in light as night falls. In addition to being Mexico's sole fortified city, UNESCO declared Campeche a World Heritage Site in 1999.



## EDZNÁ

This enormous archeological site, whose oldest remains date back to 400 AD, reached its greatest splendor as a major religious and political center around the year 1000. Its abundant structures, from temples to administrative and even residential complexes, are especially noteworthy. That said, what impresses most in Edzná — and which is a testament to Mayan knowledge and technology — is its advanced drainage system that helped empty the valley during the rainy season and channeled rains to irrigate fields in this rich agricultural region. Among other structures, the Edificio de los Cinco Pisos — located in the complex known as the Gran Acrópolis — supports a temple at its upper levels. The building is of enormous importance to the region at the spring and autumnal equinoxes; its symbolic ceremonies of renovation attract hundreds of visitors seasonally.





## CALAKMUL NATURE RESERVE

This protected area, home to the eponymous Mayan city, is Mexico's largest jungle and UNESCO declared it a biosphere reserve in 1989. The surrounding 700,000 hectares shelter more than 230 bird species and some 90 varieties of mammals, including one of the world's largest jaguar populations. Plant life is even more notable: the reserve is home to some 15,000 botanical species, many of which are endemic to the state of Campeche and can be seen nowhere else.

# CHIAPAS

There's an abundance of treasure in Chiapas, in everything from its pre-Hispanic heritage preserved by its indigenous peoples, to the Colonial-era influence in its towns and cities, and the magnificent diversity of its plant and animal life. Mayans inhabited the region starting from around 600 AD and vestiges of Mayan civilization are particularly evident in the state's northern region.

Chiapas's singular cuisine must not be overlooked, so be sure to try pork with *chirmol*, as well as *toro pinto* or *picte tamales*, plus *chipilín* in all its varieties. What's more, Chiapas is rapidly on the rise as a favorite spot for ecotourism enthusiasts.



## IZAPA

Quite close to the Guatemalan border and Tolcaná volcano, this ancient Mayan city surprises visitors with a significant number of mounds (nearly 130), many of which house temples. There's a lot that still needs to be restored, but it is known that the architectural compound encompasses more than one square mile, a considerable size that alludes to the site's importance. Pyramid bases, ball courts and plazas have been discovered, but the most exceptional discovery is *Estela 5*: a monolithic monument weighing 1.5 metric tons that, it is believed, records a creation myth. Izapa's buildings and ruins are surrounded by dense vegetation, notably cacao, which has perennially grown here in abundance.



## PALENQUE

One of the most beautiful of all Mayan cities lies amid dense jungle at Palenque, whose principal constructions date from the Classic period. The site is famed for its ball court and aqueduct, but above all for its temples and palaces that are still in quite good condition. The Templo de las Inscripciones is considered the archaeological zone's most important structure and is also the largest; its name comes from hieroglyphics that are preserved within it and which narrate the history of the city's nobility. Between the humidity, the verdant surroundings and the heat, no visitor can fail to wonder how it was that a civilization could erect these buildings under such harsh climatic conditions. The beauty of the site — UNESCO declared it a World Heritage Site in 1987 — is only enhanced by the leafy backdrop and turns every visit into a marvelous adventure.



## SAN CRISTÓBAL DE LAS CASAS

This colonial town, quite pre-Hispanic in spirit, is vastly enriched by its variety of local cultures that have found a place to express themselves to the appreciation of visitors who stroll its streets. Brightly colored traditional dress in Mayan textiles and a variety of styles are proof of the diversity of the peoples who inhabit the area. Declared a 'Magical Town' by the Mexican government in 2003, San Cristóbal also evinces a rich Hispanic heritage that is most fully appreciated in the city's architecture. One example is the Cathedral of San Cristóbal Mártir, a baroque masterpiece first begun in 1528. Its first parish priest was Friar Bartolomé de las Casas, whose name the city honors in its own.



## LAGUNAS DE MONTEBELLO

In the Chiapas highlands, 4,500 feet above sea level, is one of the state's most beautiful natural regions. Its national park protects more than fifty bodies of water of varying sizes that form between grottoes, caverns and changes in elevation, taking on a wide range of hues from lime green to cobalt blue. Nestled in mountainous surroundings, the area is a haven for pines and encino oaks as well as some species of liquidambar; in sum, this is one of Mexico's most astonishing landscapes, also home to turtles, frogs and salamanders as well as mammals such as opossums, armadillos and white-tailed foxes.

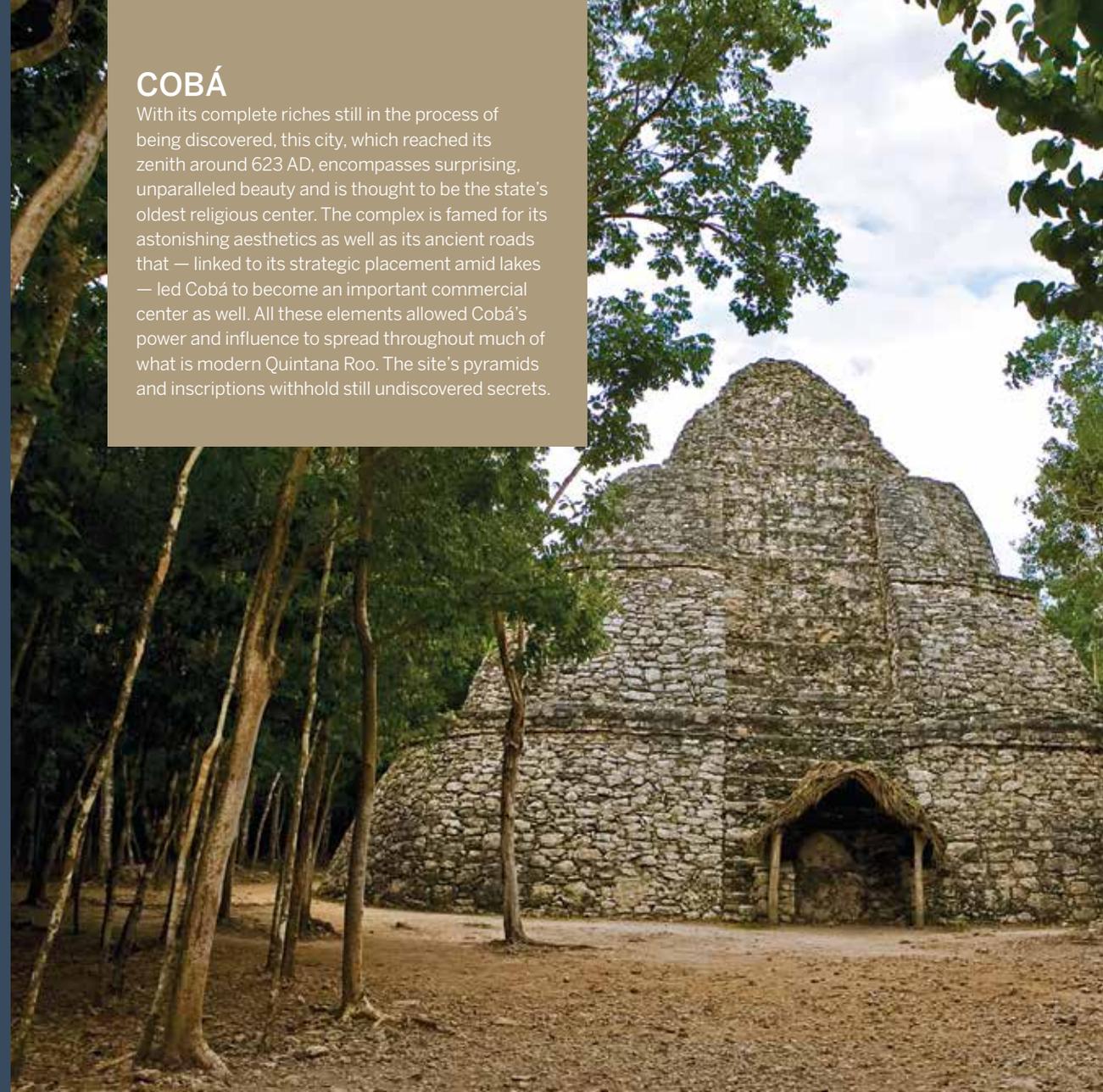
# QUINTANA ROO

Long before its huge resorts sprouted up, before Cancún and the Riviera Maya, the state of Quintana Roo was one thing only: the jungle, where it met the Caribbean Sea. Today the corridor receives thousands of visitors from all around the world who thrill to its turquoise seas. But there's more than just water: the state is a full-fledged part of the *Mundo Maya*; its modern-day territory was one of the most populous at the zenith of ancient Mayan civilization and today it is home to numerous archaeological zones that are blessed with some of the most spectacular views anywhere.

From Cancún to Bacalar, the range of travel options in Quintana Roo is enormous. Along the way there is cuisine as varied as the state's diverse population.

## COBÁ

With its complete riches still in the process of being discovered, this city, which reached its zenith around 623 AD, encompasses surprising, unparalleled beauty and is thought to be the state's oldest religious center. The complex is famed for its astonishing aesthetics as well as its ancient roads that — linked to its strategic placement amid lakes — led Cobá to become an important commercial center as well. All these elements allowed Cobá's power and influence to spread throughout much of what is modern Quintana Roo. The site's pyramids and inscriptions withhold still undiscovered secrets.





## EL CEDRAL

A small community on the island of Cozumel that is particularly fascinating because of its incredible cenotes, or sink wells, and its wide variety of plant and animal life. Its impressive archeological zone, from the Mayan Classic period, is one of 20 that remain on the island; ecologically minded visitors find its pristine nature particularly attractive. Not least of all, the site is home to the annual El Cedral Festival and its long list of cultural activities and observances.

## TULUM

Tulum is an ancient commercial port and walled city that was largely constructed during the post-Classical period. Among other functions, it was an important astronomical center and to this day is a privileged setting for stargazing or observing equinoxes and solstices. Other attractions include diverse plant and animal life, and dazzling white sands, all of which frame the imposing archaeological zone's main structure, known as El Castillo, which served as a lighthouse that helped merchant vessels avoid the nearby coral reefs. Another standout structure is the Temple of the Descending God, whose namesake deity is celebrated in numerous intriguing inscriptions.



## SIAN KA'AN

A UNESCO World Heritage Site since 1987, this biosphere reserve is a protected area between land and sea, Mexico's largest wetland encompassing some 530,000 hectares. Its coral reefs, mangrove swamps, beaches and lagoons create an ecosystem like no other, a perfect nesting area for a wide variety of bird species. Just offshore is the Mesoamerican Reef System — the world's second largest, and one of the reserve's most impressive areas — that is home to seahorses and starfish, sea snails and rare tortoise varieties. Some archaeological remains attest to traces of Mayan culture that date back to 2300 BC.

# TABASCO

Tabasco is a state where the jungle takes a starring role whether you're in the city or in a tiny coastal village. Ancient Mayan civilization established itself here, largely in the Classic period, and numerous archaeological zones attest to this presence in Tabasco.

The cuisine of the state is a reflection of its verdant and varied nature, and visiting Tabasco is a great way to immerse yourself in a flood of exotic flavor — everything from freshwater gar with squash and *epazote* herb to sea bass *tabasqueña* style — in a state that promises surprises for anyone who loves nature with all five senses.

## COMALCALCO

The most important trace of Mayan culture in Tabasco is this vast necropolis, whose construction began somewhere around 700 AD, featuring an enormous pyramid known as Templo I. Also notable is the Gran Acrópolis, which bears evidence of the different eras during which the city was constructed and used as a ceremonial and funerary center. Interestingly, the structures preserved at Comalcalco are made of adobe bricks, and not stones, as at other archaeological sites in the area. Take the time to visit temples, the palace and other buildings and mounds that make up the compound. A visit to the on-site museum — featuring artifacts from every epoch in the city's history — rounds out your panorama of the Mayan World.





## PANTANOS DE CENTLA

Pantanos de Centla is one of Mexico's most important biosphere reserves and features 302,706 hectares brimming with rivers, lagoons, swamps and wide-ranging wetlands, making it not only one of Mesoamerica's most important freshwater reserves, but also a key habitat for the nation's aquatic and sub-aquatic vegetation, including magnificent mangroves over 90 feet high. More than 560 plant and animal species inhabit its ecosystem, sheltering endangered species like the Caribbean manatee and the Central American river turtle. The area is home to 20,000 Chontal Mayan-speaking farmers and fishermen.

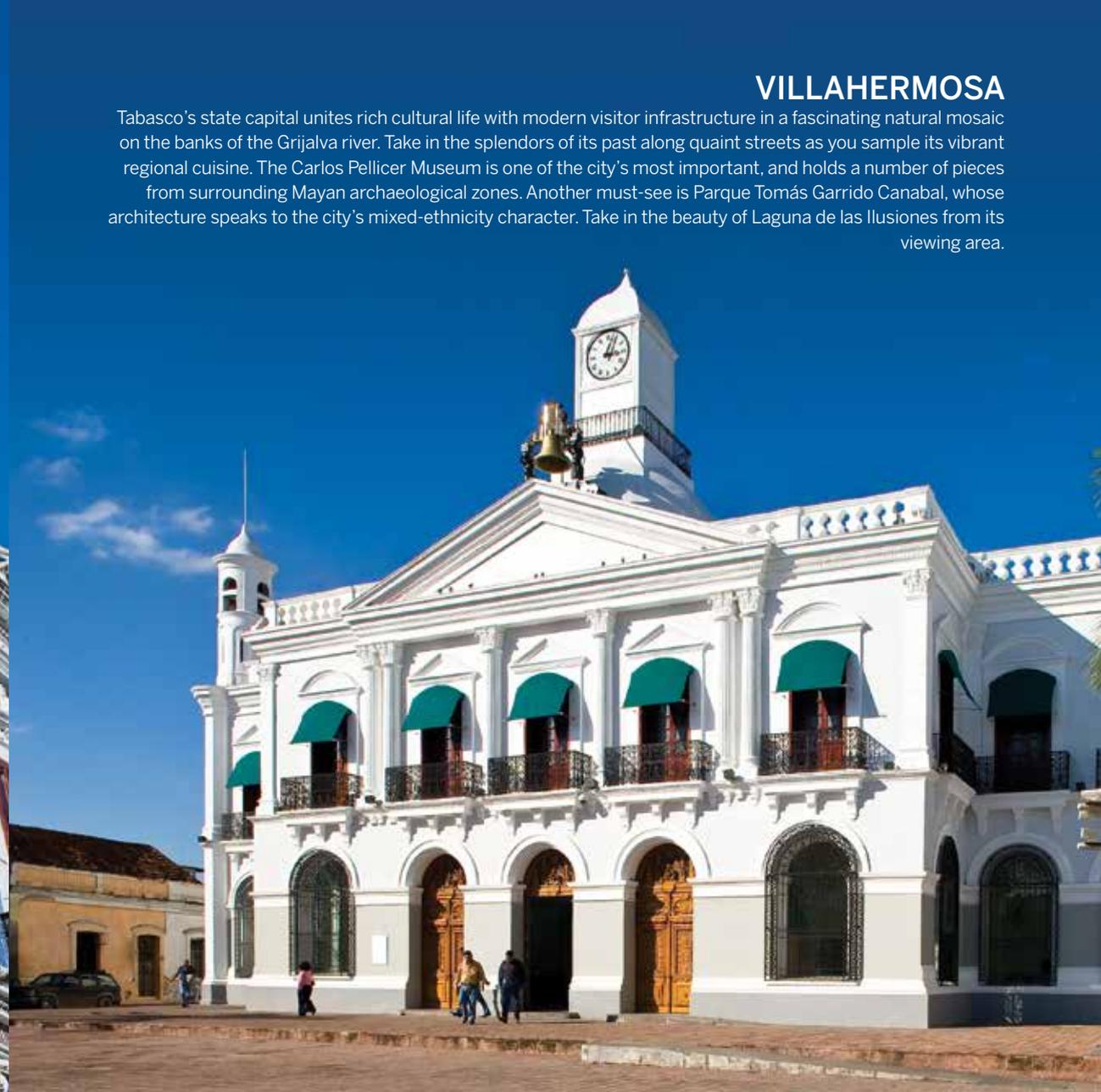
## POMONÁ

This late Classic period ceremonial city is in fact made up of six architectural compounds whose distinguishing feature is the distance that separates them. Their divergent construction techniques and materials are impressive, ranging from brick, to limestone, and more. Ruins, framed splendidly by abundant plant and animal life, make for fascinating study and hold clues to the Mayans' highly complex culture. Much of this compound's history remains to be discovered; the site museum boasts pieces found here that offer intriguing insights into its history.



## VILLAHERMOSA

Tabasco's state capital unites rich cultural life with modern visitor infrastructure in a fascinating natural mosaic on the banks of the Grijalva river. Take in the splendors of its past along quaint streets as you sample its vibrant regional cuisine. The Carlos Pellicer Museum is one of the city's most important, and holds a number of pieces from surrounding Mayan archaeological zones. Another must-see is Parque Tomás Garrido Canabal, whose architecture speaks to the city's mixed-ethnicity character. Take in the beauty of Laguna de las Ilusiones from its viewing area.



# YUCATÁN

Yucatán state was the scene of the ancient Mayan civilization's greatest splendor, where its most impressive and powerful cities were constructed during the post-Classic period; thus remains of the culture at stunning archaeological zones such as Chichén Itzá are no surprise. It's also no surprise that the people of the Yucatán take pride in the history that emanates from every corner of the state.

Eating an ice cream on Mérida's Paseo Montejo or trying local delicacies like *panuchos*, *papadzules*, stuffed cheeses and Mexico's very best *cochinita pibil* are just a sample attraction in a state made famous by its independent spirit and delicious cuisine. The Yucatecans, heirs of Mayan culture, blend unparalleled hospitality with a particular vision, different from that found elsewhere in Mexico, yet perceived everywhere in its cities and towns.



## CHICHÉN ITZÁ

Today it's considered one of the Seven Wonders of the Modern World. But what we in Mexico have known all along is that few visitor attractions can compete with this magnificent Mayan city that UNESCO named a World Heritage Site in 1988. Founded in 525 AD, the compound is famous above all for its main structure, the Templo de Kukulcán. The pyramid presents a stunning spectacle during the spring and autumn equinoxes, when in a vision of light and shadow, the legendary plumed serpent descends the pyramid's nine levels, a phenomenon that reminds us of the Mayans' extraordinary powers of astronomical observation and their unparalleled ability to express this in their architecture.

## IZAMAL

The most impressive site at the so-called Yellow City is the huge Nuestra Señora de Izamal convent, where visitors appreciate a series of mountains that are, in fact, Mayan pyramids that encircle the city. The Mayans settled here around 550 AD, and although the city came under Spanish control at the time of the conquest, it never completely lost its indigenous character. Today it is famous for its enormous open-air chapel, designed to evangelize the largest possible number of indigenous converts; its impressive, 75-arch convent compound, dating from 1561, and the cultural mix it preserves: its streets present traces of pre-Hispanic as well as Colonial-era heritage that harmonize in the lives of today's residents.





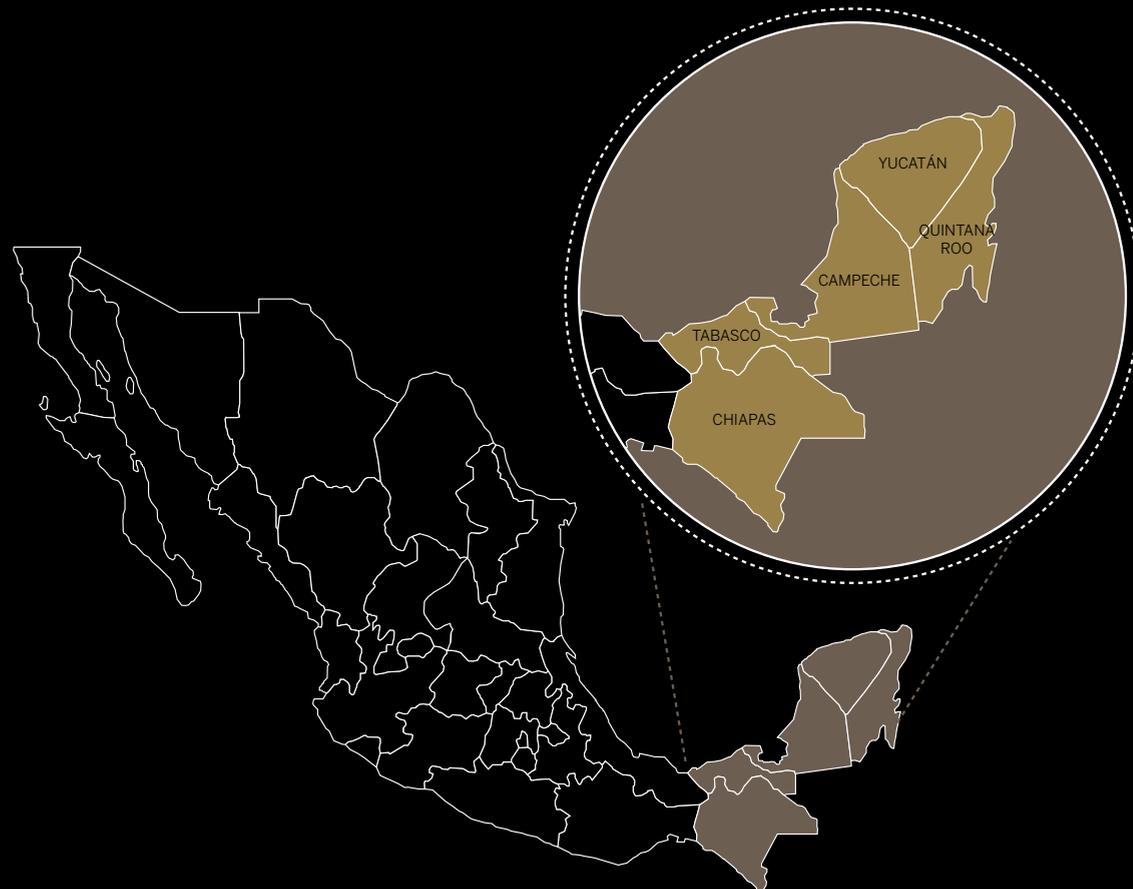
## UXMAL

As impressive as Chichén Itzá — and just as important within Maya civilization — this ancient archaeological zone, dating from the 7th century, is awe-inspiring for its regal character and its rich, smooth-walled architecture that testifies to its importance as a political and religious center in antiquity. One of most important structures is the Pyramid of the Magician, erected on five different levels and with an equal number of temples, that shows that multiple generations worked to construct it. Its structures' well-preserved state and the exuberant surrounding nature make this one of the *Mundo Maya's* most striking and most-visited cities.

## CENOTES

Yucatán state's natural gems are its thousands of subterranean rivers, accessed through sink holes known as *cenotes*, and found across the peninsula. Whether they hide in limestone grottoes or are open to the skies, they are an attraction like no other, famed for their refreshing, pristine waters. Among the most beautiful is Xlakah, around which the Mayan city of Dzibilchaltún was built; the Chichén Itzá archaeological zone has conserved its Sacred Cenote; and nearby there is open-air *Ik-kil*, featuring hanging plants and diminutive waterfalls. Near the town of Valladolid — whose Zacf cenote is right downtown — are Samulá and Xkekén, with crystal-clear waters and large subterranean chambers that sunlight can barely penetrate.





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MUNDO MAYA



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