

## tour dossier for:

# Mayan Circle

21 nights / 22 days • Mexico, Guatemala, Belize



### The Facts

**Dossier Last Updated:** 27-03-2008

**Tour Code:** YYC

**Duration** 21 nights / 22 days

**Joining City:** Cancún

**Departure City:** Cancun

**Nearest International Airport (joining / departing):** Cancún

This dossier is designed for this particular tour and should be read in conjunction with the country dossier(s), regional pre-departure booklet and optional excursions guides relevant to your itinerary. You will also receive a joining letter in advance of your journey with further information, while last minute updates may be posted in the Latest News section of our website. Please see [tucantravel.com](http://tucantravel.com) for details.



### What's Included

- Accommodation: 21 nights in hotels & cabins
- Meals: No meals included
- Excursions: Chichén Itzá, Palenque & Tikal ruins, Caye Caulker, Chichicastenango market
- Transport: Local public bus, minibus, speedboat, on foot, taxi, boat
- Group: Average 8 - 12; max 18
- Age: Recommended 18 - 60, although we do take older passengers provided they are fit and can harmonise with the group
- Staff: Tucan Travel tour leader, local guides

### What's Excluded

- Local Payment
  - International flights & departure tax
  - Border taxes There should not be any entry fees however you will have to pay some exit fees.
  - Tips on included excursions, visas, travel insurance, personal items, other tips.
  - Pre & post tour accommodation
  - Airport transfers
  - Spending money allow US\$25-30 per day to cover meals, snacks, drinks, limited souvenirs, laundry and any extras (see the relevant Country Dossier for advice on how to carry your funds)
  - Optional Excursions - Please see our [Optional Excursions Guide](#) for a comprehensive list of optional activities and excursions available on this tour
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## Brief Overview

Following in the footsteps of the ancient Mayans, this extensive tour offers an exciting look at Mexico, Guatemala and Belize. On this adventure you will visit the best and most colourful markets in the region, meet the friendly locals and travel through spectacular scenery. There are opportunities for scuba diving on coral reefs, climbing active volcanoes and exploring ancient Mayan ruins.

This is an **Adventure Tour**. [Learn about our Travel Styles](#).

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## Itinerary

### Day 1 to 3

**Cancún Chichén Itzá Mérida**

After arriving in Cancún you may have some free time to explore. Until 1970 it was just a small fishing village with one lone coconut plantation, but now, due to its beautiful beaches, it attracts over 2 million visitors a year. Relax on one of the beautiful beaches, swim in the turquoise waters or take a ferry out to the attractive island of Isla Mujeres, where you can organise snorkelling or drive around the island in a golf-cart.

There's a hectic few days ahead for those who are interested in archaeology. On day 2 we travel to Chichén Itzá, the very famous and impressive Maya/Toltec site. You will see the ball court where the captain of the winning team was beheaded (no incentive to play your best, was there?!) and the cenote (well), where huge treasures as well as the remains of human sacrifices have been discovered. Of course, the main attraction is the wonderful pyramid, which was built with such precision that a shadow serpent descends it during the equinoxes!

Leaving Chichén Itzá we head to Mérida, Yucatán's capital and a base for exploring the ruins of Uxmal (optional). This site has the famous 'Temple of the Magician'. Options in Mérida itself include taking a hop on hop off bus tour of the historical centre, and shopping! This is a great place to buy Mexican hammocks, but also have a look for the live beetle jewellery (yes really!). These ornately decorated beetles come with their own little carry box, tree to feed from and local legend about a prince who was turned into a beetle! The handicraft markets are overflowing with beautiful weavings, statues, batiks and so much more. Shop until you drop, if you're still able to carry your bag.

## **Day 4 to 5**

### **Palenque**

Next we visit the town and ruins of Palenque. This Maya site houses a series of hilltop temples and pyramids situated in a gorgeous jungle setting, with howler monkeys making a dreadful loud noise in the trees overhead! Bring your swimming costumes along and cool off in the beautiful natural pools near the exit of the ruins (optional). Other attractions near Palenque include the fantastic Agua Azul Nature Reserve with more than 200 small waterfalls, and the incredible Misol-Ha waterfall with a 30m drop, for another cooling dip (optional half day tour includes both these falls).

## **Day 6 to 8**

### **San Cristóbal de las Casas**

Ascending into the mountainous Chiapas region we drive through the Lacandon Cloud Forest on one of the windiest roads you'll ever experience (don't forget your travel sickness pills!) to the colonial city of San Cristóbal de las Casas. Situated in the middle of the Highlands, surrounded by 21 villages, here you will find Mexico's richest example of indigenous culture. Red tiled low-rise houses dominate the city, maintaining a delightful provincial charm. The next day you have the option to visit the beautiful Sumidero Canyon, and/or take a guided tour of some of the Indian villages on the outskirts, where you can buy the locally made handicrafts. This authentic cultural experience will give you a fascinating insight into how modern day Indian villages operate. If time permits, you might also enjoy visiting one of the many museums in town. The Ambar Museum, the Coffee Museum, the Maya Medicine Museum, and the 'Na Bolom' Cultural Centre are just a few on offer (optional).

Leaving Mexico we cross the border into Guatemala at Ciudad Cahuatemoc. You will find Guatemalans some of the warmest and most colourful people in the world. But be careful with the wonderful handicrafts, as you have to carry them with you!

## **Day 9 to 13**

### **Panajachel Chichicastenango Antigua**

We travel towards the Pan American Highway from where we will head to down to Panajachel on the shores of Lake Atitlán. The drive down is simply stunning scenery, with breathtaking views of the lake and its three volcanoes; San Pedro, Atitlán and Toliman, all of which are over 3,000 metres high. A pretty lakeside town, Panajachel is known to the locals as 'Gringotenango' due to its popularity with foreigners and its hippie influence in the past. Rated by those who have seen it as one of the most beautiful and colourful lakes in the world, Lake Atitlán, sits at a little over 1500 metres above sea level. Here you can go for a swim in the lake or take a boat to one of the many outlying villages (optional).

Panajachel also has many restaurants and interesting bars lining the two main streets where you can listen to 60's music, and even eat some Asian food! Leaving Mexico we cross the border into Guatemala at Ciudad Cahuatemoc. You will find the Guatemalans to be some of the warmest and most colourful people in the World. Passing through the Guatemalan highlands we travel towards the Pan American Highway from where we will head to down to Panajachel on the shores of Lake Atitlán. The drive down has simply stunning scenery, with breathtaking views of the lake and its three volcanoes - San Pedro, Atitlán and Toliman - all of which are over 3,000 metres high. A pretty lakeside town, Panajachel is known to the locals as 'Gringotenango' due to its popularity with foreigners and its hippie influence in the past. Rated by those who have seen it as one of the most beautiful and colourful lakes in the world, Lake Atitlán sits at a little over 1500 metres above sea level. Here you can go for a swim in the lake or take a boat to one of the many outlying villages (optional). Panajachel also has many restaurants and interesting bars lining the two main streets where you can listen to 60's music, and even eat some Asian food.

We now visit Guatemala's most famous market town, Chichicastenango. This village's population swells from approx. 1,000 to over 20,000 on market day (when we visit). The local Indians descend from the nearby hills to sell everything from kitchen pots and pans to live turkeys! Handicrafts, bags, jumpers and wall hangings are just a few of the bargains to be found here. After lunch we depart the market and continue to the former capital of Guatemala, Antigua.

Antigua is one of the most attractive towns in Central America. Here you will see the local indigenous population in their colourful costumes, selling their textiles in the cobbled streets and plazas. It is also the cultural centre of Guatemala, an ideal place to experience the traditional music, architecture and art of the country. Rich in ornate churches, convents, parks, plazas, cafés, restaurants, bars and colourful street markets and surrounded by three awe-inspiring volcanoes, Antigua is certainly an unforgettable place. (Many options on offer- ask your tour leader)

#### **Day 14 to 17**

##### **Rio Dulce Flores Tikal San Ignacio**

On to Guatemala City where we board a bus taking us to the river town of Rio Dulce. We stay in cabins right on the water, and have the option to take a boat tour to Livingston experiencing some of the most beautiful scenery imaginable along this 23-kilometre stretch of waterway. Livingston is situated at the mouth of the Rio Dulce where it joins the Bay of Amatique and is inhabited by the Garifuna people. This lively town has a Caribbean atmosphere different to the rest of Guatemala and is a great place to eat lobster or coconut prawns and listen to the local African-style 'punta' music.

From Rio Dulce we continue to the pretty island-town of Flores, situated in the centre of Lake Peten Itzá, which was the last town to be conquered by the Spanish. Flores is our base for exploring the incredible Maya jungle site of Tikal, which was regarded as the greatest city of the Maya world. This complex is one of the biggest Maya sites discovered and will take much of the day to explore.

Today the main centre covers an area of approx. 2½ square kilometres but at its pinnacle the city stretched for nearly 100 kilometres. As you approach the site, you may see several tall mounds which are temples that have not yet been excavated. The highest Maya temple is found at Tikal (70 metres). The emphasis was on height when creating these imposing structures because the Maya believed the higher the building the closer they were to the gods. Tikal is also rich in animal life, such as the howler monkey that was sacred to the Maya, the pizote (a racoon-like animal), bird life such as toucans and, if you're very lucky you may even see a jaguar...

A short drive takes us to the Belize border and one of the least populated and smallest countries in Central America. Formally known as British Honduras, the official language is still English but almost everyone also speaks Spanish. First stop is San Ignacio. This attractive town is also known as "Cayo" and is an agricultural centre serving the areas many citrus and peanut farms. It is also known to be the 'adventure' and 'nature' capital of Belize, being surrounded by jungle, wildlife, waterfalls, rivers and caves. There are many optional excursions on offer, from canoeing down the river or tubing through caves, to visiting the nearby Maya site of Caracol - the biggest in Belize!

#### **Day 18 to 19**

##### **Caye Caulker**

Catching a bus through the centre of Belize, we reach Belize City and take a boat out to the Cayes (islands). Belize is a great place to relax, with favourite sayings like "No problem" and, as one sign says, "Go slow". We spend a couple of very laid back nights on Caye Caulker, where you may find that you throw away your shoes to wander the sand filled streets. Another famous sign reads "No shirt, no shoes, no problem. No money, problem"! You can spend the evenings eating seafood, drinking cocktails, and listening to reggae music in one of the bars.

During the day we can organise a range of different optional snorkelling trips for you, for eg. to Shark and Ray Alley where you will make some new underwater friends- the guides will tell you not to put your fingers in the sharks' mouths, as if you would! Some of you might decide to go on the 'manatee excursion' where if you're lucky you'll see these enormous sea-cows surface to take a breath. Another optional snorkelling tour takes you out to Hol-Chan Marine Reserve where you are guaranteed to see lots of big, colourful fish. Qualified divers can explore the so-called bottomless "Blue Hole" made famous by the explorer Jacques Cousteau (please note: this optional excursion does not go every day, check locally for availability). Other options include sunning yourself on a beach, riding a bike around the island or trying your luck at fishing. If you are lucky, make sure you then take your catch to one of the local restaurants so they can BBQ it for you.

#### **Day 20 to 22**

##### **Bacalar Cancún**

We travel up the coast to Bacalar, set on the beautiful Laguna Bacalar (Lake Bacalar). The lake is one of the most picturesque in Mexico and is known as the “Lake of Seven Colours” for its seven hues reflected in its depths. Here you can go swimming in the cenote where the water is lovely and warm and there is a tyre swing! Bacalar is a quiet, tranquil town, far from the crowds and noise of the larger tourist spots and our hotel is right on the lake.

From Bacalar it's only a two hour bus journey to Cancun. Until 1970 Cancún was just a small fishing village with one lone coconut plantation, but now, due to its beautiful beaches, it attracts over 2 million visitors a year. Relax on one of the beautiful beaches, swim in the turquoise waters or take a ferry out to the attractive island of Isla Mujeres, where you can organise snorkelling or drive around the island in a golf-cart.

We spend our final night of the tour here.

Our tour departs on day 22 in Cancún

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**Important note:** The itinerary listed above is to be used as a guide only. Occasionally we may need to update this document and it may be different to the information printed in our current brochure. Tour leaders may need to make adjustments due to unforeseen circumstances during the tour. It is very important that you visit our website and review a copy of this dossier as close as possible to your departure date in case of changes that may affect your plans. Any last minute changes may also be posted in the Latest News section of our website.

### **Pre and Post Tour Accommodation**

Very little time is spent in the starting and finishing cities and you will need to allow a few days at the beginning or end of your tour if you want to explore them further. For details of pre and post tour accommodation bookings (which should be made at the time of your tour booking) please refer to our current brochure or contact our reservations team.

### **About Adventure Tours**

Adventure Tours travel by public transport wherever possible and so have a high degree of interaction with the local people. This hands-on style means that you will need to travel light (see below for details). Adventure Tours will bring you into contact with cultures and experiences that contrast dramatically with those at home and therefore a sense of humour and patience is essential!

Don't forget that Tucan Travel also offers four other tour styles: Discovery Tours (Central & South America) where we travel by private and comfortable, custom-built vehicle staying in hotels; Overland Expeditions (in South America only), which usually have a high percentage of camping, travel by overland truck and suit travellers who love the great outdoors; Budget Expeditions (great value tours for 18 to 35s) are flexible tours offering travellers optimum control over their budgets, travelling in our custom-built expedition vehicles, plus coaches and local transport, staying in pleasant hotels, hostels and campsites; Independent Travel offers personalised itineraries, stopovers and language schools with your choice of accommodation and flexible travel days.

### **Local Payment**

The cost of all Tucan Travel tours includes a compulsory Local Payment which is in addition to the Tour Price paid to your booking agent. The Local Payment **MUST** be paid to your Tour Leader in full \$USD cash at the pre-departure meeting on the first day of your tour. The Local Payment is administered by Tour Leaders and no refunds can be made for any unused services or if you decide to leave the tour early.

### **Pre Departure Meeting**

The address of your joining hotel can be found on your joining letter and tour voucher. On arrival you should look for a Tucan Travel information sheet on the hotel notice board where you will find details of the pre-departure meeting. The tour leader will normally hold the pre-departure meeting on the afternoon of Day 1 (assuming that all clients have arrived by then). Your tour leader will give a briefing about the tour, outline the plan for the next few days, answer any questions and collect your Local Payment in full in US\$ cash. Then there may be an option for everyone to go out for dinner and drinks to start to get to know one another.

Please note that you will need to bring the following important items to the pre departure meeting:

1. Passport (including any necessary visas) original document and a photocopy.
2. Vaccination certificates (e.g. Yellow Fever, if required)
3. Travel voucher
4. Travel insurance policy
5. Local Payment

## **Tour Personnel**

Adventure Tours use a variety of different styles of leadership in order to maximise your enjoyment and experiences. On this tour you will have a combination of Tucan tour leader and local guides. The Tucan Travel Tour leader accompanies your tour and local guides will lead your included and optional excursions.

## **Degree of Difficulty / Fitness Required**

Adventure Tours suit people who are fit and active. Although no experience is required there are many walks between bus/train terminals and hotels/homestays and travellers must be able to carry their own luggage over various terrains as well as lift up luggage onto the tops of buses!

There are pyramids to climb at the ruins (if you wish) which can be fairly arduous. The maximum altitude this tour reaches is about 2,335 metres (unless you decide to go on an optional volcano climb) which is not considered high in terms of altitude sickness.

As this tour uses public transport in Guatemala you must be willing to put up with a fair amount of discomfort. The local chicken buses' in Guatemala are great fun, but extremely chaotic and uncomfortable at times. You may be sharing a seat with 5 other local people or you may have to stand for some periods (up to two hours). Be prepared to be pushed, pulled, squeezed and squashed but remember this is how the locals travel in Guatemala and is all part of the fun!

## **Pre-Departure Information**

Once you have booked the tour (paid your deposit), your booking agent will provide you with a detailed pre-departure booklet with in-depth information to help you prepare. If you do not receive your pre-departure information shortly after booking your tour please consult your travel agent. After you have paid for your tour in full you will also receive from your travel agent: a local map & joining letter for your arrival city, your tour voucher and transfer voucher (if applicable).

## **Country Dossiers**

This Tour Dossier is designed to be read in conjunction with our Cuba Country Dossier which you can download from our website or obtain from your booking agent. The Country Dossiers contain essential information about visas, arrival transfers, spending money & costs, taxes & tips, climate, local food etc.

## **What you need to bring**

A full list of suggested equipment can be found in the pre-departure booklet.

We recommend hiking boots or closed sand shoes for hikes around the Tikal ruins. A towel is optional as you can quite often use hotel towels, however if you prefer your own bring it along. Alternatively, a sarong is highly recommended as it can also be used in place of a towel. Snorkelling equipment may be useful, but not necessary, as you can easily hire it locally. If you want to save space you could just bring some swimming goggles - still great for spotting fish! You may wish to bring some kind of waterproof protection cover for your pack, as luggage tends to get thrown around a lot on public transport and it may get dirty and sometimes wet.

On Adventure Tours it is very important that you do not bring too much luggage as you will find it extremely difficult to get on/off buses and trains etc and there is a fair amount of walking to/from hotels. You are also likely to encounter many cobbled streets and dirt roads so luggage on wheels is totally unsuitable. As this trip starts and finishes at the same hotel in Cancun, you may wish to leave behind some luggage if you have been travelling before or plan to travel on after this tour. The lighter your luggage the better time you will have!

You must be prepared to carry your own bags at all times. We therefore strongly urge you to limit your luggage to a maximum of 10-14 kgs. Please see the relevant Country Dossier and Pre Departure Information booklet for further information about luggage requirements and what to pack.

## **Transfers**

We do not offer arrival or departure transfers in Cancun due to the ease, availability and cheapness of local transport. When departing the customs lounge in the Cancun airport there will be many people (who speak English) offering to help you and there are several options available to you. Please see your tour Joining Letter for detailed information.

## **Accommodation**

All hotels are chosen for their central locality, security, friendliness, cleanliness and ambiance. Although sometimes simple, you will find clean comfortable rooms with en-suite facilities (occasionally bathrooms may be shared but this is rare), and often a bar and restaurant are attached or close by. All rooms will be allocated on a share basis, usually in twins or triples (depending on the male/female ratios).

## **Transport**

On Adventure Tours our goal is to offer you as much variety as possible while meeting the local people. On this trip we will be using local public buses, mini buses, taxis and boats (life jackets provided). Please see public transport note under 'Degree of Difficulty' above and keep your sense of humour! There will also be some walking with your luggage between bus terminals and hotels. Optional excursions

may use other forms of transport, for example boats, horses and mountain bikes.

## Meals

Meals, snacks and drinks are not included on this tour and are at your own expense. Your tour leader will be able to advise the best places to eat. As much of our accommodation on this tour is in home-stays in Cuba, many of our hosts will offer delicious meals, typical of the country (at your own expense), so you might prefer this to eating out! Please see the relevant Country Dossier for more information about the local food.

## Tour Highlights

- **Chichén Itzá** - The most spectacular Mesoamerican site on the Yucatán Peninsula.
- **Mérida** - Cultural and economic capital of the Yucatán, this beautiful colonial city is very Spanish and very Mexican at the same time!
- **Palenque Ruins** - One of the most beautiful Maya archaeological sites in all Mexico.
- **Agua Azul & Misol-Ha Falls** - Seven kilometres of waterfalls and rapids, surrounded by steaming jungle. (Option)
- **San Cristóbal de las Casas** - Gorgeous colonial town with fantastic souvenir markets for shopping, and options to visit the nearby Indian villages by guided tour or horseback.
- **Sumidero Canyon** - Tour by speedboat down the River Grijalva through the 1000 metre deep canyon, spotting crocodiles and birdlife along the way (Optional tour from San Cristóbal).
- **Lake Atitlán** - The most picturesque lake in Central America, with option to visit the lake-side villages by boat.
- **Chichicastenango Market** - Central America's most famous, colourful and lively market.
- **Antigua** - One of the most beautiful colonial towns in the Americas overshadowed by gigantic volcanoes.
- **Rio Dulce** - stay in jungle cabins located right on the water!
- **Flores** - A charming little town situated on an island, right in the middle of Lake Peten Itzá.
- **Tikal** - Beautiful Maya ruins set in the heart of the jungle, with howler monkeys screeching above.
- **San Ignacio** - Cradled in a picturesque valley between two rivers, there are countless adventurous options including; caving, tubing, canoeing, trekking, nature-spotting, biking, horse-riding etc.
- **Caye Caulker** - Small sandy island with no traffic and options for diving or snorkelling the world's second largest reef.
- **Tulúm** (Option) - Coastal Maya /Toltec ruins with an incredible cliff-top setting above the beach (bring your swimwear).

## Day to Day Itinerary

Day 1 Arrive Cancún (Mexico)  
Day 2 Mérida via Chichén Itzá ruins  
Day 3 Mérida  
Day 4 Palenque  
Day 5 Palenque (visit ruins)  
Day 6 San Cristóbal  
Day 7 San Cristóbal  
Day 8 San Cristóbal  
Day 9 Panajachel  
Day 10 Panajachel  
Day 11 Panajachel  
Day 12 Antigua via Chichicastenango  
Day 13 Antigua  
Day 14 Rio Dulce  
Day 15 Flores  
Day 16 Tikal ruins/San Ignacio  
Day 17 San Ignacio (Belize)  
Day 18 Caye Caulker  
Day 19 Caye Caulker  
Day 20 Bacalar (Mexico)  
Day 21 Bacalar/Cancun  
Day 22 Depart Cancún

Please note the day to day itinerary above is given as a GUIDELINE ONLY.

## Responsible Travel Tips

At Tucan Travel we are serious about our responsibility to care for the environment and people that we visit. Here are a few tips to help you to enjoy your tour while minimising your impact and enhancing your travelling experience. Learn more about our responsible travel policy at [www.tucantravel.com](http://www.tucantravel.com).

1. Carbon offset your Tucan Travel tour and flights. Check out our website for details about how you can go about this [www.tucantravel.com](http://www.tucantravel.com).
2. Bring your own metal water bottle. Fill up at restaurants or treat your own water on tour instead of buying lots of plastic bottles. Bear in mind that there may not be recycling facilities available at some destinations.
3. Cut out plastic – remove and recycle the packaging of new travel gear before you pack, and bring a light cotton or string bag for your shopping, so you can politely refuse plastic bags at shops and markets.
4. Bring a stack of pens and pencils and hand these out to children rather than offering sweets. Your alternative gifts will still be popular and the parents will thank you for saving their children's teeth – access to dental services may not be readily available there.
5. Learn a bit of the local language before you travel. Being able to say even a few words like hello, please and thank you will help you to connect with people in a positive way and really enhance your personal experience. Bring a phrase book on tour and keep practising to improve your confidence. You will also find some good language tips in the country dossier(s).

### **Feedback**

At the end of your tour we would greatly appreciate it if you could take the time to complete a questionnaire about your experiences. The tour leader will give you a paper copy and an electronic version can be found on our website. We take feedback very seriously as it allows us to maintain and improve the very high standards we expect from our road crew, local operators, hoteliers, transportation and office staff, among others. We also use this information to improve our itineraries and optional excursions on offer. Thank you in advance for your help with this.

### **Subscribe to our e-newsletter**

If you're keen to keep up-to-date with the latest news, special offers, events and competitions, why not sign up to our newsletter? It's easy - just enter your details in the 'subscribe' section on our home page, and that's it. Don't worry, we won't spam you, or pass on your details to any third parties, and it's easy to unsubscribe if you decide later on that it's not for you.

### **Join our online communities**

Make friends with fellow passengers in the Tucan Travel forums, and ask questions about any tour you like – we've got the answers! See Share your tour photos and videos on Youtube and Flickr, and keep in touch with group members on Facebook, Bebo and Myspace. There are many Tucan Travel communities out there waiting to welcome you, just a few clicks away.

### **Write a travel diary and get published on our website!**

Share your experiences of life on tour and you may be rewarded! Get in touch with us for details through [www.tucantravel.com](http://www.tucantravel.com).

### **We want your photos!**

We've taken you to some of the most amazing places on earth – why not share that with the world? Send us high resolution colour photos of your adventures, and you could be published on our website or our brochure. Contact us through [www.tucantravel.com](http://www.tucantravel.com).