

HIGHLIGHTS OF COLONIAL MEXICO

High End

Mexico City –Morelia - Patzcuaro - Guanajuato-- San Miguel Allende – Queretaro– Puebla - Oaxaca
With Ann Harmer and friends

Central Mexico: an array of majestic cities, jewels of the Spanish colonization era, UNESCO World Heritage Sites, a lively colorful world filled with history and culture.

The ancient capital of the Aztec Empire is omnipresent in today's thriving metropolis of Mexico City. Amid pre-columbian excavations, imposing colonial buildings, and ultramodern skyscrapers, a vibrant mestizo culture integrates the ancient with the modern world.

Rich minerals and Catholicism promoted the establishment of splendid cities dominated by sumptuous baroque churches. Morelia, the aristocrat of the cities built with pink quarry stones; Guanajuato, an explosion of color perched on hillsides; San Miguel Allende, a picturesque cobblestoned delight; Queretaro, monuments that tell stories; Puebla, treasures housed in tile and stone-covered buildings; Oaxaca, the perfect blend that creates a most captivating city. Archeological sites are a testimony to the origin of Mexican culture.

Reserved indigenous people in colorful dresses living in charming quaint villages maintain a simple lifestyle filled with tradition and produce magnificent crafts known worldwide. Exquisite Mexican cuisine culminates the experience.

ITINERARY

Day 1. (Thursday) Mexico City Independent arrivals

BIENVENIDOS A MEXICO

5:30 PM Gather at the hotel's scenic terrace restaurant to meet your expert local guide and fellow participants. Welcome dinner is at the restaurant. Located on the Zocalo, the terrace restaurant faces the Cathedral and the Presidential Palace offering a view of the entire plaza.

Hotel Zocalo Central, Mexico City

Meals D

Day 2. (Friday) Mexico City

THE MAJESTIC ZOCALO / WORLD CLASS MUSEUM IN A VAST PARK

As the ancient center of the Aztec Empire and the first and most important of Spanish colonial marvels in the New World, Mexico City offers culture and history in a vibrant atmosphere. Begin to explore this fascinating city with a walking excursion of the historical zocalo, a UNESCO Site. Included in the visit is the Metropolitan Cathedral constructed with the stones of the Aztec's main pyramid, the National Palace with an explanation of the internationally famous Diego Riviera murals, and the recently excavated Templo Mayor archeological site where the base of Tenochtitlan's main pyramid has been unearthed.

Board private transportation and continue to Chapultepec Park for lunch in a restaurant facing a small lake. The origin of Chapultepec Park, one of the largest and most beautiful urban parks in the world, dates to the Aztecs who planted the first Ahuehete trees near a spring and built an aqueduct later destroyed by the Spanish. With its numerable museums, lakes, a zoo, an amusement park, an auditorium and more, the vast park is an important social and cultural destination both for tourists and for local people. Among the many attractions, the park houses the world famous Anthropology Museum. Follow your guide through the most important rooms of the museum. Depart Chapultepec Park driving along majestic Reforma Boulevard where every roundabout exhibits a monument. Return to the hotel to freshen up. Dinner is in a well known restaurant near the hotel.

Hotel Zocalo Central, Mexico City

Meals B/L/D

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Day 3. (Saturday) Mexico City

FLOATING GARDENS / COYOACAN NEIGHBORHOOD

Depart by private transportation for Xocimilco. The Aztec city of Tenochtitlan was located on a lake in which the Mexicas, as the Aztecs called themselves, traveled by canoes and cultivated the land using chinampas, wooden trellises set on the water. Today, a small portion of the lake and of the agricultural system still remains known as Xocimilco. Colorful “trajineras”, small boats decorated with flowers, travel in the canals through the “floating gardens”. Boats with food and flower vendors and with “mariachis” musical ensembles ride alongside the visitors adding to the folkloric event.

Transfer to Coyoacan, a beautiful quaint colonial neighborhood of narrow streets and plazas filled with cafes, museums, bookstores and art centers. Free time to stroll along the quaint streets and enjoy the lively atmosphere. Lunch is not included in the program to allow participants to choose from the many available restaurants, from a simple “fonda” or a “taqueria” to delightful full service Mexican restaurants. Gather again with your guide in the main plaza and walk to Casa Azul, the home and museum of the famous artist Frida Kahlo.

Returning to the hotel, walk the last stretch to stroll in the Alameda Park, admire the imposing Palace of Fine Arts - Bellas Artes, and enter Correo Mayor, an eclectic emblematic Mexico City palace. Continue along busy folkloric streets lined by sumptuous colonial buildings to reach the hotel. Dinner is in a charming restaurant with a view of Templo Mayor.

Hotel Zocalo Central, Zocalo, Mexico City

Meals B/D

Day 4. (Sunday) Mexico City – Morelia

THE ARISTOCRAT COLONIAL CITY

Leave Mexico City behind driving by the ultra-modern skyscrapers of Santa Fe neighborhood. Cross forested mountains while trying to sight the snow-covered tips of the volcanos that form the Trans-Mexican Volcanic Belt. Capital of the state of Michoacan and declared a UNESCO Site, the city of Morelia is defined as the aristocrat of the colonial cities reflecting perfect urban planning. Its wide avenues are lined with over 200 sumptuous palaces, a prominent Cathedral, and stately plazas. All the constructions are uniformly built with pinkish quarry stones further giving the city a formal unified appearance. Morelia is the site of an important music festival and an international film festival. Settle in the beautiful colonial centrally located hotel.

Begin to explore the city on foot. Walk along the stately avenues to admire the beauty of each and every palace, its construction and artwork. Begin the visit with the majestic Cathedral followed by the Government Palace displaying murals by Alfredo Zalce. Continue to the Regional Museum and to one of the homes of José Maria Morelos, a hero of the War of Independence who gave Morelia its name.

Dinner is not included; choose from the many available restaurants. Enjoy a stroll on the main plaza to see the cathedral beautifully illuminated, and join the local people at cafés under the arches.

Hotel Posada La Soledad, Morelia

Meals B/L

Driving time 4 hrs

Day 5. (Monday) Morelia – Patzcuaro – Morelia

CHARMING PUREPECHA TOWNS AND VILLAGES

Described as the “Soul of Mexico”, the state of Michoacan is home to the Purepecha Indigenous people. In pre-hispanic times the Purepecha, called Tarascos by the Spanish, had developed a powerful culture able to reject Aztec domination. Today their population of over 100,000 still cling to ancient traditions and are responsible for the richness of Michoacan’s crafts, considered some of the finest in Mexico. Spend the day visiting indigenous villages and towns around Lake Patzcuaro. Delight on colorful weavings, intricate woodcarvings, original ceramics and more.

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Time stood still in the small picturesque Purepecha village of Santa Fe de la Laguna. See the traditionally dressed women draped in the blue-and-black “rebozos” (shawls) trading their goods in the simple market of the town plaza – fish still jumping. Then enter the home of a potter who revived ancient pottery making techniques and have blue corn tortillas right off the grill in a home kitchen.

Tzintzuntzan, once the center of the Purepecha empire, houses a 16th Century Franciscan convent and a craft market. Founded in the 1320’s by the Purepecha and eventually dominated by the Spanish, the small quaint town of Patzcuaro combines simple adobe tile- roofed homes painted red and white with ancient churches and convents that reveal the indigenous - colonial mestizo roots of the magical town. Walk through the plazas, the House of 11 Patios, up and down the cobblestone streets, trace the history of the Purepecha in a mural painted by Juan O’ Gorman, and perhaps witness traditional Purepecha dances. Return to Morelia. Dinner is in the charming patio of the hotel.

Hotel Posada La Soledad, Morelia
Driving time 2 hrs

Meals B/L/D

Day 6. (Tuesday) Morelia – Guanajuato

THE QUEEN COLONIAL CITY NESTLED ON A HILL

Continue to explore Morelia in the morning. The city boasts a magnificent aqueduct, one of the world’s best preserved. Built with the pinkish quarry stone, the aqueduct is a mile long supported by 253 arches. Near the aqueduct, enter the brightly decorated Santuario de Guadalupe, an unforgettable Church. Continue to Santa Rosa de Lima ex-convent which is today one of Latin America’s most prestigious music conservatory especially known for its children choir, and lastly admire the perfect symmetry of the central patio of Clavijero Palace, now a cultural center. Free time to stroll through the craft market before lunch served in a tree-shaded plaza.

Continue the circuit of Mexican colonial jewels to reach the queen city – Guanajuato, a UNESCO Site and the home of one of Mexico’s most important cultural festivals, El Cervantino. The discovery of rich silver veins in the 18th. Century promoted the construction of the city, particularly the Valenciana mine which was one of the richest silver finds in history. Nestled in the mountains, famous for its very narrow winding streets “callejones”, stairways, small plazas “plazuelas”, subterranean streets, and colorful buildings, Guanajuato reveals a unique charm. Settle in the hotel located in a quiet niche of the main plaza. The life of the city is at your doorstep. Relax on a bench to appreciate the immediate surroundings of the tree-shade plaza sided by the elaborate façade of Teatro Juarez. Gather with the guide to take a funicular that climbs the hill to Pipila Statue and a spectacular viewpoint: the city fills a steep hillside, colorful and imposing as if it were a painting, a stunning site. Take the funicular back to the plaza for dinner at an elegant local restaurant.

Hotel Edelmira, Guanajuato
Driving time 3 hrs

Meals B/L/D

Day 7. (Wednesday) Guanajuato

SERPENTINED STREETS, COLORFUL BUILDINGS, LIVELY PLAZAS

Explore the city on foot where every turn holds a new surprise. Facing the central plaza is Teatro Juarez, with a dominant Roman-inspired façade and a flamboyant interior based on an European design. Bright colorful homes and buildings line the streets, alleys and plazas. The alleys can become so narrow that a popular legend tells of a couple kissing from their balconies. Stop to admire the imposing white stone construction of Guanajuato University fronted by a wide, 133 steps staircase, viewed from the bottom! Walk past the Templo de la Compañía to see the Churrigueresque exterior. The striking bright yellow Guanajuato Basilica, one of the city’s most notorious constructions, is centrally located on a hilltop facing a larger plaza; it is noticeable both in the daytime and is brightly lit at night.

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Inside, the jewel-incrusted image of Our Lady of Guanajuato had been hidden in Spain for 800 years before it was brought to Guanajuato as a token for the abundant silver that the local mines produced for Spain! The city's turbulent history is revealed in a guided visit to the Alhóndiga de Granaditas, a granary which was the site of the first successful battle in the War of Independence, now a museum.

Enjoy free time for lunch and to continue discovering the city on your own. Wonder through the maze of alleys, plazas, and markets, visit a museum of your choice, or find a café to witness the vibrant city life. Getting slightly lost is a Guanajuato must experience! Museums and shops abound. Diego Rivera was born in Guanajuato. His centrally located native home is now a small museum dedicated to the famous artist. Guanajuato has a large collection of mummified bodies which are exposed in a museum. Gather with your guide in the late afternoon for a guided visit of the imposing Teatro Juarez, followed by dinner in a restaurant on the plaza. Traditional in Guanajuato is the "callejoneada", whereby a group of performers dressed in costumes lead a magical tour through narrow steep alleys and plazas of the city while singing, dancing and narrating local legends. If desired, join in the fun, or remain in the plaza where music groups are always present.

Hotel Edelmira, Guanajuato

Meals B/D

Day 8. (Thursday) Guanajuato - San Miguel Allende – Queretaro

THE ROAD TO INDEPENDENCE, PICTURESQUE CITY

Ex-mining tunnels are now underground roads that ease the traffic and allow sporadic views of the colorful back side of homes. Depart the city in the early morning driving through the tunnels. On the road to Queretaro, visit the sites known as the Cradle of National Independence. In Atotonilco on September 16, 1810, Father Hidalgo, a priest who became "the father of Mexico", took a banner depicting the Virgin of Guadalupe as a symbol of the nascent insurgent army, then marched to the Church of Dolores from where he gave the famous cry for freedom, now called the "Grito de Dolores", that sparked the beginning of the War of Independence from Spain. September 16 is celebrated as Mexico's Independence Day. Enter the Sanctuary of Atotonilco, a UNESCO Site, known as the Sistine Chapel of the Americas.

Declared a national monument in 1926 and recently a UNESCO site, San Miguel Allende is a lovely picturesque town of cobblestone streets, colorful colonial buildings, and an imposing parish church, an icon of gothic revival architecture. Named in honor of General Allende, one of the fathers of Mexican Independence born in the city, San Miguel Allende gained international fame thanks to the establishment of Instituto Allende in the 1950s attracting foreigners to its Art and Spanish courses. Lunch is in a garden restaurant, then join a walking tour through the city center to appreciate the variety of architectural styles represented in its buildings. Continue to Queretaro for the overnight. Dinner is in a lively local restaurant.

Hotel Doña Urraca, Queretaro

Meals B/L/D

Driving time 2 ½ hrs

Day 9. (Friday) Queretaro

MONUMENTS, AQUEDUCT, DELIGHTFUL AMBIENCE

Colonial monuments, charming walking streets, lively plazas, and a monumental aqueduct make Queretaro a UNESCO Site. The city played a major role throughout Mexican history since its founding in 1531. Admire the architecture, baroque and neo-classical, that tell the story of the city from the plotting of the Independence, the execution of Maximilian of Austria, the writing of the Mexican constitution and the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe. The guide leads the walk through the most notorious edifices of the historical center, through manicured plazas and lively pedestrian streets. Near the hotel, enter Santa Cruz monastery, the site of many of the city's events, from an Otomi legend to Maximilian's prison cell. The monks also controlled the city's water supply that reached the monastery from the grand aqueduct. With 75 arches and reaching a height of nearly 100 feet, it is today a symbol of the city.

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The baroque Temple of Santa Clara is one of the most opulent of New Spain, while the Santa Rosa de Viterbo Church boasts a stunning unique exterior that contrasts with the Baroque Neo-classical interior. Currently the Government Palace, the Casa de la Regidora was the home of Josefa Ortíz de Dominguez, the initiator of Mexican Independence Movement. San Augustin ex-monastery, now an Art Center, displays a magnificent cloister considered the most beautiful in the Americas.

Delight on a lunch in an ex baroque mansion of a duchess, sumptuously decorated. The Otomi Indigenous people of Queretaro are responsible for the creation of the colorful Mexican rag dolls with ribbon-decked hair. In an Otomi Indigenous Craft Center, make your own doll while learning about the lifestyle of these indigenous people who come to the city from remote villages. The remainder of the afternoon is free. Enjoy the life of the city while resting on a bench in any of the plazas, enter a museum, or relax at the hotel by the pool. Dinner is on your own.

Hotel Doña Urraca, Queretaro

Meals B/L

Day 10. (Saturday) Queretaro - Puebla

CITY OF THE GODS ARQUEOLOGICAL SITE

Today's drive crosses agricultural fields nicely divided by stone walls and rolling hills that encircle Mexico City to reach Puebla, Mexico's fourth largest city, important for its rich history, culture and economy. On the way, detour to Teotihuacan, one of Mexico's most noted archeological sites. Known as the City of the Gods, from the 1st. century BC up to the 5th century, the pre-Columbian city of Teotihuacan was the home of an important culture which influenced the succeeding civilizations of Mesoamerica and reached a population greater than Rome. Visit the site, walk along the Avenue of the Dead, visit the Temple of Quetzalcoatl and, if desired, climb the famous pyramids to the Sun and to the Moon.

Continue to Puebla. Declared a UNESCO Site, quarry stone, red bricks and "Talavera" ceramic tiles – original from Puebla- adorn the over 2,000 registered buildings of the city's historical center, of which over 360 are churches and convents! Located near the Cathedral, the hotel was adapted in an ex-hacienda and displays antique furnishings and locally made "Talavera" ceramics. Settle in the hotel, then begin the walking visit of the city center. A UNESCO site in itself, the lavishly gold trimmed Capilla del Rosario is considered one of the wonders of the world. Declared "Memory of the World" by the UNESCO, the 1646 Palafoxiana Library with over 4,500 antique books and manuscripts is a bibliographic jewel. Dinner is in a rooftop restaurant facing the monumental Cathedral that dominates the Central Plaza.

Hotel Quinta Real, Puebla

Meals B/L/D

Driving time 5 ½ hrs

Day 11. (Sunday) Puebla

TREASURES WITHIN TILES, BRICKS, AND STONE – COVERED BUILDINGS

Drive to the outskirts of the city. In Cholula is located the memorable church of Tonantzintla which best exemplifies the blend of Spanish baroque with indigenous motifs, referred as the "indigenous-baroque" style. Covered in colorful tiles, San Francisco Acatepec's façade shines. Continue to the Museo Internacional del Barroco, inaugurated in 2016. The sleek, avant-garde design of the building contrasts dramatically with the baroque art inside, a state-of-the-art masterpiece. In a guided visit, learn about the many aspects of baroque.

Back in the city center, lunch is in a well known Puebla restaurant. Continuing the visit on foot, walk past the Casa del Alfeñique with its elaborate stucco ornamentation, and the Casa de los Muñecos (House of the Dolls) decorated with fanciful, Talavera-tiled images, and more! At a craft market visit a ceramic factory where the internationally famous Talavera tile is produced, every step of the process elaborated by hand. Museums abound in Puebla, choose one to visit during the remainder of the afternoon or wander through the markets. Choose a restaurant for dinner on your own.

Hotel Quinta Real, Puebla

Meals B/L

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Day 12. (Monday) Puebla – Oaxaca

MEXICO'S EXQUISITE CUISINE

Depart Puebla for an all morning drive crossing a mountainous area with changes in altitudes and ecosystems: pines forests, tall cacti, dry desert. Volcanos can be sighted. Arrive in Oaxaca, the last destination of the journey. Oaxaca, one of Mexico's most captivating cities also declared a UNESCO Site, is the home of rich indigenous cultures, of magnificent baroque colonial buildings and churches, of a delicious mestizo cuisine, of excellent crafts, of traditional celebrations, of bustling markets, of archeological sites, of Benito Juarez. Walking along its ample streets and vast plazas the city transmits peace and joy. Settle in the elegant hotel, an ex-convent with beautiful patios, lunch is in one of them.

Get acquainted with the city on a brief walk along a pedestrian street and through the zocalo. Meet up with a local Oaxaca chef for a guided tour of the famed Oaxaca market. Marvel at the mounds of fried grasshoppers and other local specialties. Then continue to the chef's home to learn the secrets of the traditional Oaxaca mole while helping to prepare the elaborate sauce. Salsas, tortillas, quesadillas and more are part of the cooking class. Enjoy the dinner that you helped prepare.

Hotel Quinta Real, Oaxaca
Driving time 5 hrs.

Meals B/L/D

Day 13. (Tuesday) Oaxaca

THE ZAPOTECOS / CITY CENTER AND ALEBRIJES

Board the private bus for an excursion to Monte Alban, the social-political-economic center of the Zapotec civilization from 500 B.C. to 800 A.D, one of the earliest and most important of Mesoamerica. Located on a mountain top with grandiose vistas of the Oaxaca Valley, the vast archeological UNESCO site is impressive. Among the many discoveries during the excavations, splendid finely elaborated gold jewelry were found in the famed Tomb #7, considered one of the most important findings in Mesoamerica. Also of particular interest in Monte Alban are "los danzantes", the dancers, a series of over 300 rock carvings depicting figures in playful positions.

Return to the city center to enter Santo Domingo monastery, now a museum, where the Tomb treasures are exhibited. Lunch is on your own. Time is at leisure. You may continue the visit of Santo Domingo museum and church, stroll through the many galleries and fine shops of the city or relax by the pool. In the late afternoon, gather in a gallery to try your hand at painting your own "alebrije", woodcarvings of colorful imaginative figures, sometimes monstrous, that have reached world fame. Dinner is in a lively restaurant.

Hotel Quinta Real, Oaxaca

Meals B/D

Day 14. (Wednesday) Oaxaca

ARQUEOLOGY AND LOCAL CULTURE

Again, an excursion to the city's outskirts reaches another important archeological site, Mitla. Meaning the place of the dead and of the underworld, Mitla was the religious and ceremonial center of the Zapotecs, contrasting with Monte Alban which was the social-economic center. It is the only pre-Columbian site adorned with fine geometric mosaic designs made with small polished stones fitted together. Traces of the original red plaster are visible. The Spanish built the church of San Pablo located in the site using material from Mitla ruins! Additional stops are made during the drive. In Teotitlan del Valle, see weavers at work spinning and dyeing the wool with natural dyes which is then used to weave rugs. In Tlacoahuaya, a church also decorated with naïve "indigenous baroque" style paintings, listen to a suggestive, brief organ concert played on a 400 years old air pump organ. A simple lunch is in a local home. On the return drive, stop in a Mezcaleria to taste Mezcal, an indigenous agave-based alcoholic beverage original from Oaxaca. A last stop is in Santa Maria del Tule to see the 2,000 years old Moctezuma cypress; with a 46 ft diameter and a 190 ft circumference, it is said to be the widest tree in the world.

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Back in Oaxaca, free time to get ready for farewells. One of Mexico's most beautiful folkloric events is the Guelaguetza which takes place in Oaxaca every year in July, lasting several days. Gather in a private room of the hotel for a presentation of the event, a small sample of the traditional costumes and the lovely dances. A farewell dinner follows in the refined hotel dining room.

Hotel Quinta Real, Oaxaca

B/L/D

Day 15. (Thursday) Oaxaca – Return
FAREWELL

The program ends in the morning. Breakfast is included. The guide is available to help with transfers to the Oaxaca airport.

Meals B

SERVICES INCLUDED

- Private land transportation
- 14 nights hotel accommodations in 4, 5 star or boutique hotels
- All breakfasts and most meals with one non-alcoholic beverage(3 lunches and 3 dinners are on your own)
- All visits and excursions described in the itinerary
- Experienced Andiamo guide
- Taxes and tips of included hotels and meals
- Andiamo's personalized attention

NOT INCLUDED

- Flights to Mexico City and from Oaxaca
- Tips to guides and driver
- Three lunches and three dinners
- Alcoholic and additional non-alcoholic beverage

DATE Thursday September 5 to Thursday September 19, 2019

PRICE \$ 3,200.00 USD per person in Double Occupancy
\$ 1,350.00 USD Single Supplement

Price based on a minimum of 18 passengers

Maximum capacity is 24 passengers