

# Insiders Guide to Chichén Itzá

Smart tips for sustainable journeys to Mexico's most-visited Maya monument

Guidebooks tell thrilling tales of a pre-Hispanic city of gold, jade, and human sacrifice, but the modern story of Chichén Itzá is every bit as fascinating as its past. The UNESCO World Heritage Centre, the Government of Mexico, and the World Heritage Alliance have joined resources to preserve Chichén, create valuable tourism services, and generate jobs for nearby communities. Travelers to this World Heritage site—one of Mexico's 26 cultural and natural World Heritage sites—can aid in its preservation and participate in its vital culture by interacting with locals, buying genuine handicrafts, supporting area businesses, and exploring surrounding villages. Read on to learn how sustainable tourism can benefit Chichén Itzá and communities near the site.



## The thriving world around Chichén Itzá

Visiting the jungle-fringed empire of Chichén Itzá is an amazing first step on a journey into the heart of Maya culture. A day spent exploring the ancient monuments of this World Heritage site, inscribed in 1988, opens a window onto a world with roots that span centuries. But the archaeological wonder of Chichén Itzá is just one aspect of today's region that rewards visitors with discoveries at each turn. "Many travelers are surprised to learn that 1.5 million native Mayan speakers live in the Yucatán Peninsula," explains **Fernando E. Barbachano**, whose Mayaland Resorts Group holds properties near the monuments. "My hope is that every visitor to Chichén Itzá leaves with a sense of ancient history and an appreciation of the living Maya, who have so much to teach us about their world, their culture, and their fragile ecosystem." Responsible travelers to the Yucatán have the opportunity to experience a thriving Maya culture that bridges the past and the present. Cuisine, artisanry, spirituality, language, and more are still a vibrant part of Maya communities in and around Chichén, and locals are eager to share these gifts with you. In the town of Pisté you can purchase locally made handicrafts in a market that directly supports area artisans. Near the pre-Hispanic city of Ek Balam you can sleep in huts that resemble Maya houses. And throughout the Yucatán you have the chance to keep Maya culture alive by interacting with, learning from, and supporting local communities. Turn this page for eight great tips on making the most of your visit and discover four more Yucatán World Heritage sites.

Chichén Itzá World Heritage site

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## Sustainable travel to Chichén Itzá

Like the slithering shadow that snakes down the Pyramid of Kukulcán at the spring and autumn equinoxes each year, the influx of tourism—which draws 5,000 visitors to this site each day—carries its own threat. Here are eight actions you can take to enjoy, protect, and enhance Chichén Itzá.

- **Respect the monuments.** The structures of this Maya city are more than a thousand years old. Climbing the monuments is forbidden. Tread lightly and take out all that you carried in.
- **Take your time.** Give yourself at least four hours to explore all of Chichén, its old city as well as later-period monuments.
- **Learn about Maya achievements.** The Observatory of Caracol conveys Maya notions of astronomy, time, and math.
- **Hire local guides.** Support the regional economy and see the site as locals view it by selecting guides that are recommended by community-based tour operators.
- **Refrain from bargaining** for crafts. Visit the official center for local artisans in the nearby town of Pisté.
- **Spend the night at a local inn.** Stick around after the daytrippers depart for a taste of regional culture and cuisine.
- **Explore the region around Chichén.** Visit the cave of Balankanché, a Maya ceremonial space, and the Cenote Zací, at the heart of the town of Valladolid.
- **Preserve the environment.** Reduce, reuse, and recycle.

For more information on responsible travel and for ideas about preserving destinations, visit [www.friendsofworldheritage.org](http://www.friendsofworldheritage.org)



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## Five Yucatán World Heritage Sites

Take time to explore all the amazing World Heritage sites in the Yucatán and the warm-spirited communities nearby.

## What can you do to support World Heritage in the Yucatán?

**Learn** more about World Heritage initiatives at Friends of World Heritage: [www.friendsofworldheritage.org](http://www.friendsofworldheritage.org)

**Explore** World Heritage sites in Mexico with the Mexico Tourism Board: [www.visitmexico.com](http://www.visitmexico.com)

**Discover** how geotourism supports and enhances World Heritage sites at *National Geographic Traveler*: [www.nationalgeographic.com/traveler](http://www.nationalgeographic.com/traveler)

**Travel** to Yucatán World Heritage sites with Expedia: [www.expedia.com/worldheritage](http://www.expedia.com/worldheritage)

**Read** about the work of the UNESCO World Heritage Centre: [whc.unesco.org](http://whc.unesco.org)

## World Heritage Photo Contest

Are you a traveling sharpshooter? Send us your most captivating digital images of World Heritage sites. Top images will be published online. For rules, prizes, and more visit [www.friendsofworldheritage.org](http://www.friendsofworldheritage.org)