

My Mexico City Travel Guide

You know when you ask your friend for their bomb recommendations about a recent trip they went on? Well, this is that. As a Destination Specialist, I have the privilege of sharing my passion for travel through "pick your brain" sessions, where I offer personalized advice and curate unforgettable journeys for travelers. My experiences, both personal and professional, have allowed me to explore deep into the heart of this vibrant country, discovering hidden gems and crafting itineraries that showcase the very best of what Mexico has to offer. Following my most recent session, I've been inspired to share my own itinerary for an ideal escapade in Mexico, drawing from my extensive travel and planning experience.

Best Time to Visit

Mexico City experiences a temperate highland climate, with temperatures averaging between 57°F during the colder months and reaching up to 68°F in the warmer seasons. The period from June through September marks the city's wettest months, with an average of 20 days of rainfall each month, making it a less ideal time for visitors who prefer dry conditions.

The peak season for visiting Mexico City falls between March and May, excluding the Easter holidays when prices may spike. Despite this exception, both accommodation and flight costs tend to remain within a reasonable range. Early booking is advisable to secure the best deals during this period.

The months of October and November also present an excellent opportunity to explore the city, coinciding with several vibrant festivals that bring the city to life. Notable celebrations include Día de la Raza on October 12, Día de los Muertos on November 1, and Día de la Revolución, which collectively contribute to a festive and lively atmosphere across the city. However, it's important to note that this time also sees an increase in hotel and flight prices, and the weather tends to be cooler, so packing warmer attire is recommended for a comfortable experience.

Acclimatizing to Altitude

Situated at 7,385 feet above sea level, Mexico City's high elevation can cause altitude sickness for some. Staying hydrated and keeping medication handy are essential tips for a comfortable stay.

Arriving in Mexico City

The city's international airport is well-connected, offering numerous nonstop flights from major U.S. cities. Affordable and convenient, it makes Mexico City an accessible destination for an impromptu gourmet or cultural getaway.

How to Get There

The capital's primary air gateway, located just 6 kilometers east of the downtown area, ranks among the nation's most frequented airports. This hub is divided into two terminals by a pair of runways, with an Airtrain providing a link between them. Each terminal is equipped with an extensive array of eateries and shops, in addition to amenities like complimentary internet access and foreign currency exchange.

How to Get Around

For those looking to head into the heart of Mexico City, multiple transportation methods are available: Taxis offer a quick and straightforward option, with the journey to the city center taking approximately 15-20 minutes. Taxi stands are conveniently situated at the entry points of both terminals.

Ride-sharing services, including Uber and Cabify, are operational and provide an alternative means of transport from the airport. Uber offers an economical way to traverse the sprawling metropolis, complemented by the efficient and cost-effective metro system. For a comprehensive city tour, consider the hop-on, hop-off bus.

The Metrobus presents an economical choice, requiring a 20-30 minute travel time. Passengers must buy a Metrobus Smart Card from machines located near Entrance 7 of Terminal 1 or Entrance 2 of Terminal 2.

Various bus lines offer routes to different locales within and surrounding the capital. Ticket counters and boarding areas are accessible on both the Upper and Ground levels of Terminal 1, and on the Ground level of Terminal 2, with fares varying by destination. For those preferring to drive themselves, car rental options are readily available on the airport premises.

Where to Stay

Neighborhoods of Choice: La Condesa and Roma Norte are top recommendations for their proximity to dining, architecture, and parks.

Best Hotels

Polanco is another prime option, albeit a bit further from the city's core. Booking ahead is advised, especially during peak seasons. Don't tell anyone I told you this but the third floor at Molière 48 in Polanco is a hidden gem. There's a red phone booth there that opens a secret door to an outdoor area if you know the right code, *whispers* "cigar". This place is perfect for those who love rum, whisky, and cigars. There's a sign that says men can smoke there, and they offer cigars from famous brands like Vegas Robaina de San Luis, Flor de Las Antillas, Toro Gordo, Cohiba, and more from around the world. If you can afford it, you can even get your own private storage space for what you buy. Now, back to the basics before we get into the good stuff.

The Sofitel Mexico City Reforma stands out as a prime hotel recommendation in Mexico, renowned for its spectacular rooftop views and unparalleled spa facilities. This modern oasis along the Paseo de la Reforma combines historic charm with contemporary luxury, offering guests a unique vantage point of the city from its sophisticated rooftop bar and 40-story tower. The hotel boasts 275 rooms, including the opulent Imperial Suite with breathtaking views of the Angel of Independence. Dining options range from the Mediterranean and Mexican fusion at Balta to the rooftop Citizyn, providing exceptional cityscape views. The spa is a highlight, offering an array of treatments and a tranquil pool on the 38th floor for ultimate relaxation. Located on the lively Paseo de la Reforma, close to Chapultepec Park, the hotel provides impeccable concierge services for a fully curated Mexico City experience. Don't miss the signature Mexican Eagle cocktail for a taste of local flavors.

The Carlota Hotel offers a modern and unique stay near a key boulevard, appealing mainly to younger guests and couples. Its architecture features a blend of contemporary materials, and its 36 rooms vary in design, with options for terraces for those preferring more light. The accommodations provide double or king-sized beds, with thoughtful touches like local candies and a well-stocked minibar. Bathrooms are equipped with high-end amenities, blending modern and vintage designs. Complimentary Wi-Fi is available, and the on-site restaurant serves seafood dishes until 11 p.m. The central pool area adds charm but may contribute to noise. Noteworthy for its design and details, the hotel suits design enthusiasts who are not sensitive to noise.

This contemporary lodging in Mexico City's Colonia Roma combines modern design with historical elements, offering a prime location close to cultural and culinary hotspots. The property boasts a unique blend of amenities, including a sunlit patio for socializing, a dark-toned lobby for relaxation, and a variety of guest accommodations that feature elegant décor, comfortable bedding, and luxurious bath products. Its rooftop suites provide private outdoor spaces with city views, enhancing the stay with an urban oasis feel. The on-site spa caters to relaxation needs with a range of treatments. Its strategic location in Roma places guests within walking distance of the area's best attractions, making it an ideal base for exploring the city. The service is discreet, focusing on personalized care, and the hotel is equipped to accommodate guests with mobility needs, though it's advisable to request rooms that cater to specific accessibility requirements.

Language, Currency, and Safety Communication

The official language of Mexico is Spanish, most of the Mexicans working in the tourist industry speak/understand English but it is not uncommon to find yourself in situations where the person you are attempting to talk to speaks zero English at all. Because of this, it's wise to brush up on your Spanish before heading to Mexico City. At least learn a some of the common verbs, question words, and foods.

Although I took multiple years of Spanish in high school and college completing each course with a 100 A average in each class, I realized in Mexico that I had forgotten most of it, unfortunately.

I would suggest travelers use a translation app (my favorite being Google Translate) in order to communicate at times you have a more specific request/question. With all that being said, the locals are friendly and seem to show appreciation for travelers' attempts at speaking their language.

Useful Phrases in Spanish:

-
- hello/goodbye: hola/adios
- please/thank you/you're welcome: por favor/gracias/de nada
- Ice cream: helado/nieves
- To go (as in take-away): para llevar
- Where is the bathroom: ¿Dónde están los baños?
- I want/need ____: quiero/necesito ____
- Avocado: aguacate

Currency

The Mexican Peso's conversion rate is favorable for travelers, making dining and shopping affordable. Carrying cash is advisable for smaller transactions.

Safety

Yes, I know what you're thinking – is Mexico even safe to visit these days? Well, my enchilada-loving friends (you do like Mexican food, right?), I had the same exact thought. Crime, drug cartels, gang-related violence, and kidnappings are all, unfortunately, associated with Mexico (past and present). It's true — Mexico's got a bad rep. BUT after research you will find that visiting Mexico City is just like visiting any other big city. Sure, there's areas to stay away from and I wouldn't gallivant around solo at night, but those are precautions I take regardless of the destination.

And wouldn't you know – Mexico City has the same travel advisory as Paris does (Level 2: Exercise Increased Caution) according to the U.S. Department of State. Read more about the travel advisory (highly recommended) here before making any travel plans to Mexico, as it's wise to always do your own research as situations and safety can change. Exercise caution by not displaying costly gadgets prominently and remain particularly vigilant after dark, especially when alone. Throughout my three-day stay in Mexico City, my sense of security was comparable to that of my hometown.

I discovered that the tourist-favored neighborhoods of Roma, Condesa, Juarez, Polanco, Cuauhtemoc, and San Rafael appeared extremely secure. In fact, I spent roughly two days exploring these areas on my own, in addition to the time spent with my husband, as part of a two-week journey through Mexico, and I felt completely safe doing so.

Must-Do Activities

With our taste buds ready and curiosity sparked, let's move through the diverse flavors and aromas that position Mexico City as a paradise for food enthusiasts. From savory delights to sweet treats, the upcoming sections of our guide will guide you through a memorable food journey, showcasing the best that this extraordinary city has to offer.

The Culinary Connection

At the heart of the city's food lore is Centro Storico's Los Cocuyos, a venerable establishment that has been a beacon of traditional culinary art for over fifty years, celebrated for its traditional nose-to-tail tacos, and providing a genuine taste with each serving and inviting a deeper appreciation for Mexico's culinary roots. Orinoco adds a contemporary flair to these traditional dishes, while Tacos el Paisa and Taqueria El Greco are essential stops for food enthusiasts like myself. For a guided experience, food tours by Club Tengo Hambre or The Curious Mexican grant access to the city's hidden food treasures and promises an insightful journey through Mexico City's rich food-centered heritage.

Eat Like a Local is another food tour in Mexico City for up to six people, creating a more personal and relaxed experience. These tours, focusing on street food and markets, draw food lovers from all walks of life. Rocio, who runs the tours, is a food blogger with deep knowledge of and passion for Mexico City's culinary landscape. She aims to bring tourists closer to local life in a way that benefits the city sustainably. The tours are flexible, allowing you to indulge in extra mezcal or pork carnitas if you wish. Priced at \$100 or more, the tours offer great value. Rocio makes sure to pay food vendors well and supports local projects, including children's education. You don't need to be a food expert to join; anyone interested in exploring Mexico City's authentic tastes is welcome.

Speaking of carnitas, cantinas are Mexico's classic bars, once only for men until 1988, but now more open to everyone. They range from fancy with old wooden bars and stained glass to simple spots with plastic chairs. Located mostly downtown, these bars hide their inside activities from passersby with swinging doors. These bars are key to Mexico City's drinking culture, offering live music and free snacks or meals after you buy a few drinks, with each place having its own rules. Beer and tequila are the main choices, along with basic mixed drinks. Some cantinas offer simple snacks, while others serve full meals, especially the upscale ones that are as famous for their food as for their drinks. It's easy to explore these bars in the city center, enjoying a drink and the unique vibe of each place. Going with friends makes the experience even better.

The Juárez area has changed a lot. It used to be rough, but now it's filled with cool shops, places to eat, parks, and bars. Near Plaza Washington, you can find artisan chocolates at La Rifa, vintage stuff at Loose

Blues, and natural wines at Cicatriz. It's more laid-back than the fancy Polanco district, making it a great place to hang out. La Rifa Chocolateria celebrates Mexico's long history with cacao, a key ingredient in the country's culture since ancient times. They roast their own cacao right there. You can sit at tables outside, shaded by trees, perfect for relaxing for a while. If you ask, they might show you how they make their chocolate in the back. The best thing to try is their water-based hot chocolates, which are made the way ancient Mexicans did before Europeans brought milk. The staff will gladly tell you about how they roast their cacao, the different tastes, and the history of chocolate in Mexico.

The tradition of *sobremesa*, or the leisure time following a meal, holds significant value in Mexico City. It's a time for unwinding and engaging in meaningful conversations, ideally in the myriad of local dining spots that mix traditional and modern flavors. Establishments such as Contramar and Rosetta offer sumptuous meals and create an environment for guests to enjoy prolonged moments of pleasure. Expendio de Maiz and Masala y Maiz showcase the city's flair for culinary creativity with their distinctive fusion menus.

In the early evening, the city comes alive with families and friends lining up for churros and chocolate at popular spots across Roma, Centro Historico, Condesa, Polanco, and Cuauhtémoc. You can find popular churro shops in several neighborhoods. Watching the churros being made and choosing from different chocolate flavors is part of the fun. The places can get busy, but it's worth it for the tasty treat. The experience of watching your churros being made and choosing from a variety of chocolate flavors, including traditional Spanish or lighter Mexican versions, adds to the enjoyment. Despite the potential for crowds, the lively atmosphere and the delicious combination of churros and chocolate make it a memorable part of any visit.

Historical Havens

Exploring the cultural and historical layers of Mexico City is indispensable for any visitor. San Angel offers a more tranquil, refined aspect of Mexico City, with its colonial architecture and green vistas. This district is known for the studios of Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo, providing a closer look at their creative lives. The museum, often called "Casa Azul" because of its bright cobalt blue walls, is the place where the artist Frida Kahlo was born, grew up, lived, and passed away. When you visit, you can see some of her artworks and those of her husband, Diego Rivera, along with works from other artists from their time. What's really fascinating is getting a behind-the-scenes look at their life. The house has been kept just like it was when Kahlo was alive. You can see their belongings and everyday items. There's also a collection of Kahlo's clothes and the corsets she wore to support herself after a severe injury, offering a personal glimpse into her challenges.

Art enthusiasts and history seekers will be drawn to the vast collections at Museo Jumex and Museo Nacional de Antropología indispensable for their vast collections that cover everything from contemporary pieces to relics of ancient civilizations. Rounding out the cultural journey is my recommended tour of Casa Luis Barragan, a gem of modern Mexican architecture and a key figure in this realm, offers an awe-inspiring visit for those who appreciate innovative design. The San Angel Inn, nearby, is a tribute to traditional Mexican hospitality, serving exceptional margaritas and classic cuisine against the backdrop of mariachi music.

If you've been to Mexico City a few times and are looking for something different, check out the Cárcamo de Dolores. Originally built in 1951 to be part of the city's water system, it's now a museum and cultural site that shows the city's history with water. It's in a quiet part of Chapultepec and is being fixed up, but you can still see the big sculpture of Tlaloc, the Aztec water god, outside. The place was

designed by Ricardo Rivas, and there's a cool mural by Diego Rivera that used to be underwater. It's a great spot for visitors who think they've seen it all.

Market Moments

Journeying through Mexico City's lively markets and peaceful waterways gives you a real feel for local life and traditions. Every market, from the big Mercado de la Merced to the small Mercado Medellín, shows off the city's rich culture. These busy places are full of vendors selling fresh local food, connecting you directly to the city's culture and food scene. Smaller markets like Mercado Medellín and Mercado Juárez offer a closer look at daily life, letting you try local tastes and find handmade items. For those who love unique clothes or vintage finds, La Lagunilla is perfect, especially on Sundays when it turns into a hotspot for rare treasures. The Mercado de Jamaica, known for its flowers, draws visitors with its beautiful blooms, making it a great place for photos.

Away from the busy market life, located about 40 minutes south of Mexico City, Xochimilco, a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 1987, is a must-see in Mexico City. Offering a glimpse into the pre-Spanish era with its extensive network of waterways it's a place where you can experience a slice of Mexico's rich traditions and nature by floating through its canals on colorful trajinera boats. Starting from the Embarcadero Belem dock, you can hire a boat and a "boat captain" to navigate the canals. As you explore, you'll encounter musicians like mariachis and marimba players who can add to your experience with their music. Don't miss the Island of Dolls, a unique spot filled with dolls hanging from trees, created to ward off the spirit of a girl who drowned nearby. Morning tours with Arca Tierra show the historical farming methods of the area, offering a calm and beautiful trip on traditional boats.

Prices are reasonable and can be negotiated. While weekdays offer a peaceful experience, weekends are lively with locals celebrating various occasions on boats filled with music and joy. You can bring your own snacks and drinks or buy them from vendors floating alongside. Visiting Xochimilco requires at least half a day due to its distance from the city center, but it's worth the time, in my experience for a unique and potentially romantic adventure.

Watching Lucha Libre wrestling at Arena Coliseo is a must-do. The venue is big and offers different seating options based on how much you want to spend. Whether you're a big fan or just looking for a fun night, you'll enjoy the exciting matches.

MXCD Nightlife

As night falls over Mexico City, the city comes alive with a bustling nightlife, famous for its cantina bars. Exploring these places, like La Faena and Cantina Tio Pepe, which open their doors to an eclectic mix of patrons you'll find they have a long history and welcome a diverse crowd. The smell of traditional mezcal fills the air, and you can hear lively chats and laughter, all mixed with the sound of crunchy snacks. This dive into the cantina scene, which used to be just for men, now welcomes everyone and gives a real feel of the city's nightlife, mixing history with modern Mexican life.

Plaza Garibaldi

Plaza Garibaldi, near the Palacio de Bellas Artes, is known for its mariachi bands. The area has been fixed up recently, making it a great place to enjoy music. It's a cultural meeting point of sorts, where travelers can come day or night (though the best time to go is after 11 p.m.), to watch bands solicit bar patrons, cars, and passersby to buy a song. Salón Tenampa, one of the oldest bars nearby, is a good spot to experience this important part of Mexican culture.

Bars & Clubs

As it's such a big city there are obviously many districts and neighborhoods you could find yourself in. Each one has a unique take on nightlife, whether it be with locals or with foreigners. The most popular places to party are for sure Roma, Condesa, and Polanco, and here you'll experience the best Mexico City nightlife in the city. Polanco is probably the most expensive place to party in all of Mexico City. With bars/lounges such as Scotch, expect to break the bank by paying for a few cocktails. There are also popular clubs like Republica and Janis (mentioned below) with upper-class clientele. Roma and Condesa can be combined into one category as they are within walking distance of one another (20 minutes). Here you'll find the highest concentration of bars and nightclubs in the city. Here you'll find mostly foreigners as the area has been mostly gentrified. You can find super cheap bars/clubs and also pricier/fancier places. Centro Historico is the old town of Mexico City and here you'll find old clubs and bars such as Pata Negra, Terraza Rooftop bar, Donceles 88, and Cultural Roots, a fun and eccentric nightclubs that usually play reggaeton music.

Costs to Party

Most people assume the Mexico City nightlife to be cheap compared to some first-world countries like the US, Canada, or UK. While there may be some very cheap towns and beach towns in Mexico, Mexico City is typically more expensive when going out compared to other places in the country. You'll definitely spend less than going out in say Miami, New York City, or Montreal, but don't expect to be having a night out for only \$15.

Here is a basic outline of what you'll typically pay on a good night out in CDMX:

Cover for entry to some clubs: \$5-\$30

Cerveza (national beer such as Corona): \$1-\$7

Cocktails: \$4-\$15

A shot of Tequila or Mezcal: \$1-10

Bottle of liquor at a club: \$50-200

Bar or finger food: \$5-\$15

Of course, this depends on what area of Mexico City and what bars you're hanging out at. If you're drinking at Cottoritos for example, you'll only pay \$1 for a beer or a shot. If you're partying in Polanco you're gonna pay at least \$6 for a beer. A bar like Gin Gin or Carajillo will set you back around \$20 per cocktail in most cases.

Xaman

Xaman is a cozy, hidden bar known for its calm atmosphere and dim lighting, attracting a sophisticated crowd who enjoy high-end drinks. It's a great place to visit for a unique experience, though it might be expensive for frequent visits.

Patrick Miller

Patrick Miller is a dance club in Roma Norte that looks plain from the outside but is full of life inside, especially on Fridays. One of the most notorious and popular clubs to experience Mexico City nightlife where people of all kinds come here to dance to a variety of music. There are no seats, but there's an upper level where you can take a break and watch the dancing below.

Jardin Paraiso

Jardin Paraiso is a favorite spot for both visitors and locals eager to experience the nightlife in Mexico City. Known for its fantastic vibe, it's a great place to start your evening, if you manage to get inside. On

weekends, there's usually an entry fee of 200 pesos, and you can enjoy a variety of music including salsa, reggaeton, and pop.

Pulqueria Los Insurgentes

Pulqueria Los Insurgentes is a laid-back spot with a local feel, serving pulque, a traditional beverage made from agave that's strong and distinctive. It's a good choice for those looking to try something authentically Mexican.

Departamento

Departamento is a very popular spot for nightlife in Mexico City, attracting lots of visitors from other countries. It starts off as a relaxed lounge and turns into a club as the night goes on, playing a lot of house music. It has three levels, including a rooftop where people gather to chat, smoke, and drink. It's a friendly place to meet others and enjoy a fun night. The drinks cost a bit more than at other places, and there's often a line to get in, so it's a good idea to arrive early, around 10 or 11 PM.

Montana Disco

Montana Disco is a unique club hidden behind the Coppola Vinyl Pizza restaurant. It's not easy to spot from the street, but once you pass through its heavy curtains, you enter a world that feels like it's from a movie or a sci-fi story. It looks like a blend of the past and the future, with a disco vibe. Inside, you'll find fog machines and disco balls under neon yellow lights, all moving to the music played by DJs each night.

Mexico City is full of amazing places to visit, from Frida Kahlo's famous blue house to the lively boats in Xochimilco. There's delicious chocolate to try, secret bars to discover, and so many foods to taste. Plus, you can learn a lot about the city's history and culture just by walking around. Don't forget to check out the local markets and cantinas for a real taste of the city life.

Why just think about it when you could be planning your trip? Whether you need some tips to get started or want a full plan without any of the work, I'm here to help you experience one of my favorite quick vacation spots. If you're not into planning, let me do it for you. I can make sure you see all the best spots.

Now's the time to get ready for an adventure in Mexico City. If you're interested, just let me know, and we can make your trip unforgettable. Get in touch, and let's start planning your visit to this amazing city!