

Atlas

CULINARY ADVENTURES





Come explore the unique culinary world of the Maya and the Yucatán Peninsula with Atlas Culinary Adventures. We're concentrating our 10-day adventure within the triangle of the ancient Spanish colonial and Maya regions of Mérida, Campeche, and Valladolid, called "The Pearl of the East". Of the hundreds of thousands of visitors that flock to the Yucatán every year, fewer than 5% ever venture to the stunning colonial city of Mérida, "The Paris of the West", or "The Golden City" Izamal, and even fewer to the magnificent ancient fortified port city of Campeche, known as "The Hidden Treasure of Mexico"...Mexico's most restored colonial city. This tour encompasses three UNESCO World Heritage Sites, which are Chichén Itzá, Uxmal, and Campeche.


Our main purpose is to thoroughly explore what is Mexico's most unique and sophisticated regional cuisine. The Yucatán peninsula is host to three separate and distinct culinary styles. The *oriental* of Valladolid is known for its *longaniza* sausages and *escabeche* dishes, such as *pollo en escabeche oriental* (twice-cooked shredded chicken with chiles and sour orange juice). There is heavy Cuban and Caribbean influence in Mérida, while it also offers the impact of the Lebanese and Syrian populations who emigrated there at the turn of the century. Campechan cuisine, known as the most subtle and refined of the three, is heavily influenced by Spain. Pasta (*fideo*) and rice dishes that closely resemble the *paellas* of the Iberian peninsula, tender octopus stewed in its own ink, and recipes using capers, saffron, and olives are as common there as coconut-based tropical dishes and indigenous Mayan fare.


In the background of these variations are the ingredients (venison, boar, turkey, iguana, etcetera), methods (*pib* underground ovens), and seasonings (*pipianes*, *chilmoles*, *recados*) of the Pre-Hispanic indigenous Maya...the true foundation of the region's cuisine. With a 1000 mile-long Caribbean and Gulf coastline, the absolutely freshest seafood is a major component of the cuisine, as is the amazing variety of native and introduced tropical fruits cultivated on the peninsula. For those who avoid spicy food, much of Yucatecan food is surprisingly mild, with hot sauces and salsas served on the side, in bowls and bottles.


We'll eat with local Maya families in Maní and Valladolid as they prepare home-style meals for our limited-sized group, including dishes seldom eaten by non-Mayans. Our host family in Valladolid will give us a rare personal tour of their traditional *milpa* farm, (the classic farming system developed by the Maya), a cooling dip in their private *cenote*, as well as a personal chef's tour of the city market. In Maní we'll also get a tour of the town's communal *molino*, where the ladies bring their soaked corn to be ground and made into tortillas every day.


 e'll eat at every type of culinary venue: from street and market vendors, to the *cocinas económicas* and *loncherias* of the *campesinos*, the *restaurantes típicos* favored by the locals, *palapa*-style seafood huts perched on the water's edge at the beaches, as well as some of Mexico's most elegant and sophisticated restaurants. We'll drink in the *cantinas* that offer little savory tastes (*botanas*) with every drink, much like the tapas bars of Spain.

 e will experience the intoxicating sights, tastes, and aromas of the bustling food markets. Mérida's vibrant market is the largest on the peninsula, and Oxkutzcab's incredible *mercado* serves as the central fruit and vegetable basket for the entire Yucatán peninsula. We'll get an exclusive private tour at the D'Aristi distillery: producer of local rums, *Xtabentún* (the delicious honey & anise liqueur with roots in the ancient Maya), coconut and native fruit liqueurs, jams and preserves, and habanero salsa. We'll watch Belgian chocolates being made from Mexican *criollo* chocolate beans before we devour them ourselves; we'll visit seafood farms and see lively seafood markets and the fishing fleet at Yucalpetén, on the Progreso coast, where the Caribbean meets the Gulf.

 e will drink highly-ranked local beers like *Montejo* and *León Negra*, local small-batch rums and liqueurs, and, of course, the imported *tequilas* of Jalisco and the *mezcales* of Oaxaca in the process; taste real (still made with sugar) Mexican Coca Cola (Yucatán has the highest per capita consumption of Coca Cola in the entire world); sweet indigenous drinks spiced with cinnamon and vanilla, such as rice-based *horchata*, *masa*-based *atole* and its chocolate cousin *champurrado*, *jamaica* (made from hibiscus flowers), *tanchucúa* (made from fresh corn, chocolate, allspice, and sugar), Chiapan *altura* coffee, etcetera.

 hile exploring the cuisines, we'll also immerse ourselves in the culture, art, music, architecture, and archaeology of the Yucatán and the Maya ...touring the well-known ruins of Chichén Itzá and Uxmal, but also the stunning seldom-visited ruins at Ek Balam, the Puuc Route ruins of Labná, Sayil, and Kabáh, and Edzná ...all of which are built in a more refined artistic Mayan style than the Teotihuacan-influenced Chichén Itzá. At many towns on the peninsula we'll encounter magnificent Spanish colonial churches, cathedrals, and monasteries that date from the 1500s.

 e will sing and dance, especially in Mérida, (known as one of the music capitals of Mexico, with performances on the squares nightly) to the *trova*, *jarana*, *son*, and *bolero* that comprise the traditional musical genres of Yucatán; we'll watch the varied styles of *folklórico* dances, including the *suerte de la vaquerías*, where nimble dancers balance a fully loaded serving tray on their heads. We'll party at El Cumbanchero to live Cuban music (with piano played by the son of a Buena Vista Social Club member), and at the famous El Burladero: a legendary bar with a bullfighting/matador theme.


 n this Atlas journey you'll land in the tranquil Mérida airport. We will stay in small, private, luxurious boutique hotels, swaddled in comfort and style, often situated in restored buildings that date from early Spanish colonial times. Links to the hotels where we are booked in each area:


Mérida: The Villa Maria <http://www.villamariamérida.com/hotel.htm>

Chichén Itzá: Mayaland Hotel <http://www.mayaland.com/>

Uxmal: Hacienda Uxmal <http://www.mayaland.com/hindex.htm>

Campeche: Hacienda Puerta Campeche www.starwoodhotels.com/luxury/search/hotel_detail.html?propertyID=1507

 e'll travel in chartered buses, as well as in horse-drawn *calesas* and *victorias* (named after Queen Victoria's buggies), and even in *triciclos* - the three-wheeled bicycle taxis that are the mainstay transportation of small Maya villages.

 o join us in our all-encompassing culinary adventure into the foodways, cuisines, and culture of the Yucatán on a revealing, exciting, and delicious journey you'll remember always, contact us at our web site.

Date:

February 16th thru 26th

Cost & Coverage:

The total cost is \$3000, 10 days and 9 nights, all meals provided, inclusive of everything except your flight to Mérida, drinks over the standard amount with meals, personal incidentals, and your personal shopping.



e'll be shopping at the source for the highest quality Maya and Yucatecan handicrafts and foodstuffs:

- * Genuine, hand-woven, ultra comfortable Yucatán hammocks of the highest quality, made from sisal and cotton
- * *Bécaleño* hats ("Panama" hats) hand-woven of *jipi* palm fibers in the underground caverns of Bécal, a Maya village between Mérida and Campeche
- * Exquisite *huípila* and *terno* Maya embroidery in many regional Yucatecan styles
- * *Guayabera* shirts, custom-fitted and tailored if you desire
- * *Huarache* and *alpargatas* leather sandals made by master leather craftsmen
- * World-famous Yucatecan honeys, especially those derived from the *tzi-tzi-ché* flowers near Valladolid, produced by the ancient strain of Mayan non-stinging bees
- * The famous conserves and jams of Tinún (near Campeche), made from local fruits such as nance, mango, circuit, *marañon*, *sapote*, *saramullo*, *mamey*, etc...packed in syrup or steeped in local liqueurs
- * Luscious Belgian chocolates made from Mexican *criollo* cocoa beans, the world's highest grade
- * Artisanal Mayan craftsman pottery and artwork of such quality that it has fooled museum curators
- * Silver filigree jewelry that boggles the mind with its quality and intricate detail
- * Artisanal sea salt from the coast, produced the way it has been for the last 3000+ years by the locals (trading salt was a source of much of the Mayan empire's power)
- * Renowned hand-ground *achiote*, *recado*, and *chilmole* seasoning pastes, and fresh ground dried *habanero* chile powder
- * *Xak*, the Mayan ground spice mix of cinnamon, clove, oregano, black peppercorns, cumin, and allspice
- * Bottled Yucatecan *habanero*, *xcatik*, and *xnipek* chile salsas
- * *Altura* coffee beans from the highlands of Chiapas, prized for their strong, yet smooth taste
- * Locally-made small-batch *añejo* rums and indigenous fruit liqueurs



e'll eat at famous venues like *Los Almendros*, the original Maya restaurant in Ticul, where the trend of indigenous Maya fare being offered in restaurants all started; *La Flor de Santiago* in Mérida, known for their *mucbil pollo* tamale; *El Tucho* in Mérida for their Cuban-style roast suckling pig; *La Pigua* in Campeche, considered one of the finest seafood restaurants in all of Mexico; *Cenaduria Portales* in Campeche, which made # 32 of the 2004 Top 100 list of *Saveur Magazine* for their *horchatas de coco* and *panuchos*; *Kinich Kakmó* in Izamal, which has a reputation as one of the best restaurants on the entire peninsula for authentic traditional village dishes; *El Mesón de Marqués* for the very best versions of classic Valladolid dishes....



f you thought you knew Yucatecan food, consider these delectable dishes:

Ceviches of an incredible variety, made from fish and shellfish minutes out of the water

Camarón al Coco: coconut-battered shrimp with mango sauce... the original (and best- tasting) Campechan version of this now popular dish

Arroz con Pulpo: an exquisite rice and octopus salad

Camarón Filete: shrimps formed into the shape of a filet mignon and bacon-wrapped, then fire-grilled with garlic

Pámpano en Escabeche: pompano, lightly grilled, then simmered in a sour orange- pickling sauce

Mucbil Pollo: the fantastic Yucatecan Day of the Dead tamal of chicken and pork baked in an underground oven

Joraches: masa croquettes stuffed with small shark meat, served in a light bean broth w/roasted habanero chiles

Papa Negro en Salsa de Chiltomate: tortillas dipped in black beans, stuffed with spiced hard-boiled eggs & rolled, topped with a sauce of tomato, onion, bell pepper, and mild chiles

Fideo Valenciana: paella Valencia-style, made here with spaghetti, unique to Campeche

Salsa Verde for grilled fish: made from tomatillos, garlic, onions, scallions, cilantro, parsley, lime, and green chiles; rich and slightly tart

Costilla de Puerco Yucateca: pork ribs marinated in sour orange, chiles, achiote, and lime, baked & basted, then grilled over a smoky fire

Pavo en Salsa Alamendras: stewed turkey topped with a rich almond-based sauce

Pan de Cazón: tortillas dipped in a *jitomate* sauce (epazote & habanero added), coated w/black beans, topped with shredded seasoned small shark, stacked three high, and topped with more fire-roasted tomato sauce

Pámpano Polchuc: achiote & garlic-marinated pompano, stuffed with shrimp & tomatoes, wrapped in banana leaves and baked

Pebre: achiote-glazed chicken served with a pork stuffing, topped with a sauce of tomatoes, chiles, raisins, capers, and saffron, topped with fresh white cheese

Pulpos en su Tinto: tender octopus in its own ink: stewed for 3 hrs with herbs and sweet peppers

Papadzules: chopped hard boiled egg rolled up in tortilla and covered with savory pumpkin seed sauce; garnished with a drizzle of pumpkin seed oil; the name means “Food of the Lords” in Maya

Queso Relleno: originally from Curaçao; a small Edam cheese (that historically came from Dutch traders), stuffed with seasoned meat *picado*, seafood, etc., served hot and meltingly succulent

Relleno Negro: roast turkey in a delicious black sauce of fire-roasted chiles and seasonings

Venado Poc Chuc: venison marinated in sour orange and spices, baked in a banana leaf to tenderness, topped with sliced *longaniza de Valladolid* sausage

Carnero estilo Yucateco: cubed lamb with tomatoes, *recado rojo*, vinegar, chiles, and bell peppers, stewed and served over sieved *ibis* (a local small white bean)

Queso Napolitano: flan made with cream cheese, with a firmer, almost cheesecake-like consistency

Caballeros Pobres: bread slices soaked in sweet vanilla milk, drained, coated in meringue and fried, topped with a cinnamon-clove syrup, with raisins & almonds

Paletas: popsicle-like frozen treats made solely from the juice and pulp of some 50-odd tropical fruits, harvested and frozen at their peak of ripeness.... literally so good you cannot stop eating them...and ice cream...luscious tropical ice creams and sorbets can be found everywhere we go.

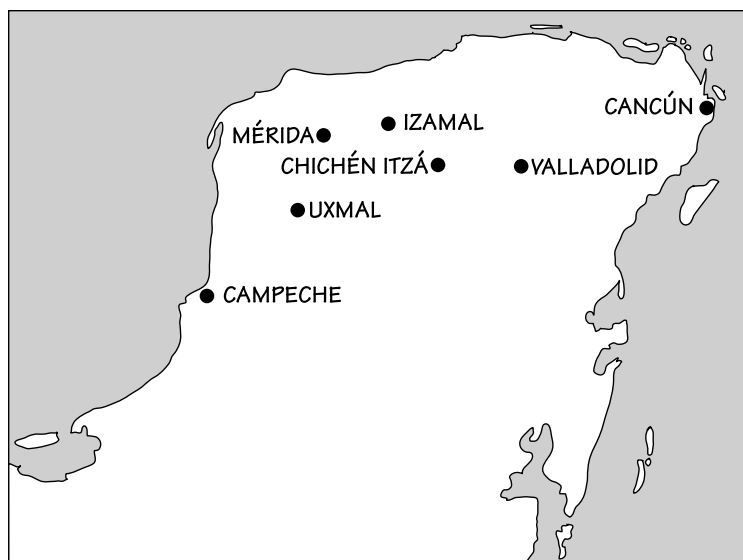
Your passionate, friendly, and knowledgeable guides:



Mick Vann: Owner of *Atlas Culinary Adventures*, Mick is an Austin-based food writer, award-winning cookbook author, retired professional chef, horticulturist, and ethnic cuisine expert.



Claudia Alarcón: Staff-partner, Claudia was born and raised in México City, is an Austin-based food writer, culinary anthropologist, retired professional chef, and Maya expert.



The average tourist visits the resort cities of Cancún and Cozumel; Atlas Culinary Adventures travels instead to the hidden gems of the Yucatán Peninsula — the triangle of the ancient Spanish colonial and Maya regions of Mérida, Campeche, and Valladolid.



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