

# 5 Must-See Sites in the Yucatán

Explore vital histories, landscapes, and cultures at these World Heritage sites

World Heritage sites are sources of inspiration to travelers and places of cultural pride and economic opportunity for local residents. The UNESCO World Heritage Centre, the Government of Mexico, and the World Heritage Alliance have joined to preserve these treasures, create valuable tourism services, and generate jobs for surrounding communities. Our efforts have begun in the Yucatán Peninsula, home to five of Mexico's 26 natural and cultural World Heritage sites. When planning your trip to the Yucatán, include time to enjoy these amazing places, explore villages, buy handicrafts, interact with residents, support area businesses, and savor the region. Read on to learn sustainable tourism tips that benefit the Yucatán's World Heritage sites.

## 1 Sian Ka'an Biosphere Reserve A natural World Heritage site since 1987



George W. Stone

Sian Ka'an means "Origin of the Sky" in the language of the Maya who first inhabited this stunning 1.3 million-acre biosphere reserve. This bird-lover's paradise is home to more than two dozen Maya archaeological sites and vibrant communities. **Trip Tip:** Snorkel in

the bay, cruise a lagoon, and spend a night in Punta Allen, a sustainable fishing community of 600 inhabitants. Community Tours Sian Ka'an ([www.siankaantours.org](http://www.siankaantours.org)) will take you there and donate 5% of its profits to conservation of the reserve.



Mexico Tourism Board

## 2 Pre-Hispanic City of Chichén Itzá A cultural World Heritage site since 1988

This sacred site (A.D. 600-1250) is among the finest examples of pre-Hispanic civilization in the Yucatán Peninsula. Visit at the spring and autumn equinoxes to see the sun's shadow create the slithering illusion of a snake moving down the Pyramid of Kukulcán. **Trip Tip:** Help reduce pressure on this highly visited destination by exploring other great sites nearby: Balankanché cave, a Maya ceremonial space, and Cenote Zací, in the town of Valladolid. Remember to carry out all materials you carried in.

## 3 Pre-Hispanic Town of Uxmal A cultural World Heritage site since 1996

The Maya town of Uxmal (A.D. 600-1000), which once bustled with 25,000 inhabitants, represents the pinnacle of late Maya art and architecture. Look to friezes and areas above doorways for carved stone masks of Chac, the sneering Maya rain god who ruled the world and held up the sky. **Trip Tip:** Spend the night in the area around Uxmal and take your time touring this city—but keep to the trails and avoid the temptation to climb these ancient monuments.



UNESCO/Photo: Henry Jones

Yucatán World Heritage sites



Promoting and Preserving World Heritage Through Sustainable Tourism



## 4 Historic Fortified City of Campeche A cultural World Heritage site since 1999

The outer walls and rigid fortifications of this harbor city, built atop a Maya town, were designed to defend this port against attacks from the sea by fierce English and Dutch buccaneers and real-life Caribbean pirates such as Francis Drake and Rock Brasiliano. This outpost, settled before 1517, was founded in 1540 as the first Spanish settlement in the Yucatán. **Trip Tip:** For insight into Campeche's pirate past, visit the museum at the Fort of San José el Alto to see colonial weapons and boats; archaeological treasures from Calakmul are also on display. Then head to the Casa de las Artesanías market to buy handicrafts in a manner that directly benefits the local artisans who make them.



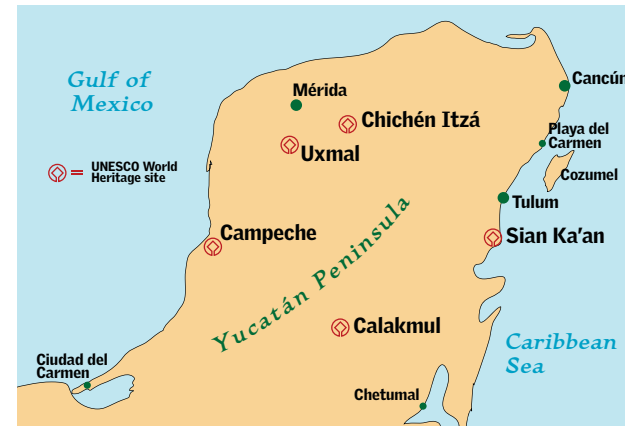
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## 5 Ancient Maya City of Calakmul A cultural World Heritage site since 2002

To date more than 6,250 structures, some containing tombs and jade masks, have been discovered at this 27-square-mile Maya site, which was inhabited as early as the third century B.C. and flourished through the ninth century A.D. Calakmul, which means "the city of the two adjacent towers," is centered around a pair of ornate 14-story pyramids and set in the vast tropical forest of southern Mexico's Tierras Bajas. **Trip Tip:** The ruins are at the heart of the Calakmul Biosphere Reserve, the largest forest reserve in Mexico, which supports a huge range of animal and plant life but faces threats from population growth and logging. Camping at designated areas provides a low-impact way to enjoy the environment and sites.



Patricia Taméz



## 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)