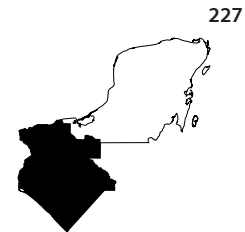


Tabasco & Chiapas



Mismatched siblings, the neighboring states of Tabasco and Chiapas are almost a study in opposites. Smaller Tabasco – between central Mexico and the Yucatán Peninsula – is less diverse than Chiapas, and prone to flooding, as demonstrated by the catastrophic flood of October 2007 (see boxed text, p228). A largely flat, steamy, well-watered lowland, it has fewer visitors, but those who do drop in discover a place with fascinating pre-Hispanic heritage from the Olmec and Maya civilizations, a relaxed tropical lifestyle, an entertaining capital city in Villahermosa, and a unique environment of enormous rivers, endless wetlands and good Gulf of Mexico beaches.

In Chiapas, pine-forest highlands, wildlife-rich rainforest jungles and well-preserved colonial cities highlight a region of incredible variety. Palenque and Yaxchilán are evocative vestiges of powerful Maya kingdoms, and the presence of modern Maya a constant reminder of the region's rich and uninterrupted history. The colonial architecture of San Cristóbal de Las Casas and Chiapa de Corzo gives way to fertile plots of coffee and cacao in the south-western region known as the Soconusco, and for outdoor adventurers, excursions to Laguna Miramar and the Cañón del Sumidero are unmissable.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Scaling the jungly hills and soaring Maya temples of **Palenque** (p240)
- Strolling the high-altitude cobblestone streets of **San Cristóbal de Las Casas** (p231)
- Cruising through the waterway and sheer high rock cliffs of the spectacular **Cañón del Sumidero** (see boxed text, p245)
- Hiking in and lazing away a few splendid days at the mountain-ringed **Laguna Miramar** (see boxed text, p245)
- Admiring the mysterious art of the ancient Olmecs at **Villahermosa** (p228) and **La Venta** (p228)



■ POPULATION: TABASCO 2 MILLION;
CHIAPAS 4.3 MILLION

■ AREA: TABASCO 25,267 SQ KM;
CHIAPAS 74,211 SQ KM

TABASCO

Few travelers linger in Tabasco longer than it takes to see the outstanding Olmec stone sculpture in Villahermosa's Parque-Museo La Venta. But staying a little longer will reveal a very rewarding slice of the real Mexico, with few other tourists, some intriguing pre-Hispanic sites (both the Olmecs and the Maya flourished here), and a large and lively capital city.

In late October and early November 2007, prolonged heavy rainfall led to major floods here, submerging a whopping 80% of the state. The federal government quickly mobilized food distribution and emergency shelters, and relief donation centers sprouted up nationwide as people pitched in to head off the humanitarian crisis. Though the floodwaters have receded, full economic recovery is expected to take years. By early 2008 most infrastructure, attractions and travelers' services were already up and running.

VILLAHERMOSA

☎ 993 / pop 673,000

This sprawling, flat, hot and humid city, with over a quarter of Tabasco's population, was never the 'beautiful town' its name implies, but it takes advantage of its position on the winding Río Grijalva, with a welcome riverside leisure development a couple of blocks from the pedestrianized city center. Still, when the river burst its banks and engulfed the city in 2007, the result looked like New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina.

TABASCO FLOODS OF 2007

Due to the severe flooding that hit the state of Tabasco during the time of this book's research, making all routes nearly impassable, our author could not access the state. Our research for this section consisted of personal contacts by phone and internet, and input from local citizens and fellow travelers. At the time of publication, the state was still in recovery. While we've tried our best to ensure the text is current and useful to travelers, some of these listings may be out of date.

Orientation

The central area, known as the Zona Luz, extends north-south from Parque Juárez to the Plaza de Armas, and east-west from the Río Grijalva to roughly Calle 5 de Mayo. The main bus terminals are between 750m and 1km to its north.

Parque-Museo La Venta lies 2km northwest of the Zona Luz, beside Avenida Ruiz Cortines, the main east-west highway crossing the city. West of Parque-Museo La Venta is the Tabasco 2000 district of modern commercial and government buildings.

Information

Hospital Cruz Roja (☎ 315-5555; Av Sandino s/n)

Main post office (Sáenz 131; ☎ 9am-3pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat)

Tourist office (Av Ruiz Cortines; ☎ 8am-4pm Tue-Sun) In the Parque-Museo La Venta.

Sights

The fascinating outdoor **Parque-Museo La Venta** (☎ 314-1652; Av Ruiz Cortines; admission M\$40; ☎ 8am-5pm, last admission 4pm, zoo closed Mon; Ⓜ) was created in 1958, when petroleum exploration threatened the highly important ancient Olmec settlement of La Venta in western Tabasco. Archaeologists moved the site's most significant finds, including three colossal stone heads, to Villahermosa. The park features a **zoo**, **sculpture trail** and **sound-and-light show** (admission M\$100; ☎ hourly 7-10pm, closed Mon).

Next to the park entrance, the **Museo de Historia Natural** (☎ 31421-75; admission M\$15; ☎ 8am-4pm Tue-Sun) has quite well-set-out displays on dinosaurs, space, early humanity and Tabasco ecosystems (all in Spanish). The park is 3km from the Zona Luz.

The **Regional Anthropology Museum** (☎ 312-6344; Periférico Carlos Pellicer; admission M\$25; ☎ 9am-5pm Tue-Sun) is a little dilapidated and poorly labeled (in Spanish only), but still holds some interesting exhibits. The museum is 1km south of the Zona Luz.

Tours

Turismo Nieves (☎ 314-1888; reservaya@turismonieves.com.mx; Sarlat 202; ☎ 8am-7pm Mon-Sat) offers a range of comprehensive tours around Tabasco.

Sleeping & Eating

Hotel Oriente (☎ 312-0121; fax 312-1101; Madero 425; s/d/tr with fan M\$220/250/360, with air-con M\$300/330/420; Ⓜ) The Oriente is a well-run

downtown hotel, with comfortable, spick-and-span rooms.

Hotel Olmeca Plaza (☎ 358-0102, 800-201-09-09; www.hotelolmecaplaza.com; Madero 418; r Mon-Thu M\$750, Fri-Sun M\$590; Ⓜ ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎) The classiest downtown hotel also has an open-air pool and well-equipped gym. Rooms are modern and comfortable.

Market (Hermanos Bastar Zozaya s/n; ☎ 5am-7pm) Fresh vegetables, chilies, fish, meat and big dollops of local atmosphere.

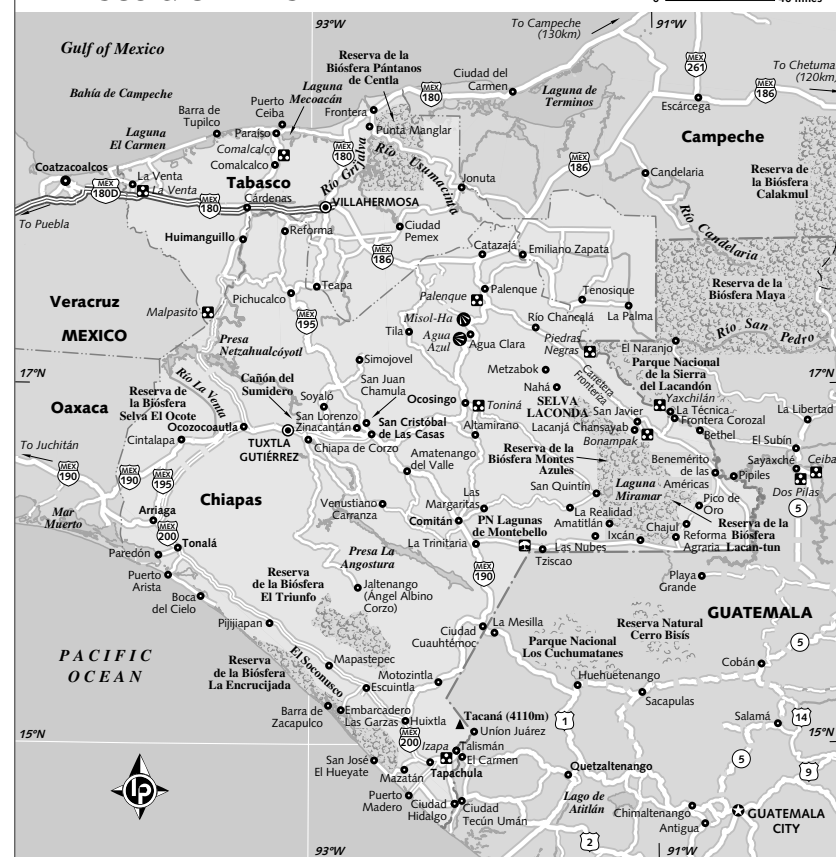
Riviera Villahermosa (☎ 312-4468; Constitución 104; mains M\$75-160; ☎ 1pm-2am Mon-Sat, noon-6pm Sun) The Euro-Mex menu is pretty good, and the air-conditioned 4th-floor setting with floor-to-ceiling windows overlooking the river is spectacular.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Villahermosa's **Aeropuerto Rovirosa** (☎ 356-0157) is 13km east of the city center, off Hwy 186. Nonstop or one-stop direct flights to/from Villahermosa include the following destinations: Cancún (Click Mexicana, flies daily), Houston, Texas (Continental Airlines, flies daily), Mérida (Aviacsa and Click Mexicana, flights daily), Mexico City (Aeroméxico, Aviacsa and Mexicana de Aviación, eight or more flights daily), Monterrey (Aeroméxico and Aviacsa, both with one nonstop flight daily), Oaxaca (Click Mexicana, flies daily), Tuxtla Gutiérrez (Click Mexicana, flies daily) and Veracruz (Aeroméxico, flies daily).

TABASCO & CHIAPAS



BUS & COLECTIVO TAXI

The 1st-class **ADO bus terminal** (☎ 312-8422; Mina 297) is 750m north of the Zona Luz and has a luggage room. Deluxe and 1st-class UNO, ADO and OCC buses run from here, as well as a few 2nd-class services. For a sample of departures from the ADO bus terminal (most in the evening), see the table (below).

Getting Around

A taxi from the airport to the city center costs around M\$180 (M\$150 from the city to the airport) and takes about 25 minutes. Any taxi ride within the area between Avenida Ruiz Cortines, the Río Grijalva and Paseo Usumacinta costs M\$15. *Combi* (a catch-all term used for taxi, van and minibus services regardless of vehicle type) rides within the same area are M\$5.

AROUND VILLAHERMOSA**Comalcalco**

☎ 933 / pop 40,000

The impressive ruins of ancient **Comalcalco** (admission M\$35; ☎ 10am-4pm) make a visit to this hot, bustling town, 51km northwest of Villahermosa, worthwhile. This Maya site is unique because many of its buildings are constructed of bricks and/or mortar made from oyster shells. Comalcalco was at its peak between AD 600 and 1000, when ruled by the Chontals. It remained an important center of commerce for several more centuries.

The museum at the entrance has a fine array of sculptures and engravings of human heads, deities, glyphs and animals, such as crocodiles and pelicans.

The site is 1km (signposted) off the Comalcalco-Paraiso road. Vans to the turnoff (M\$5) stop outside Comalcalco's ADO bus terminal (for details, see right). A taxi to the site costs around M\$20.

The **Hotel Copacabana** (☎ 334-1933, 800-224-77-77; www.hotelcopacabana.com.mx; cnr Juárez & Serdán; s/d M\$595/712; Ⓟ) is the best hotel in town.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Comalcalco's **ADO bus terminal** (☎ 334-0007; cnr López Mateos & Monserrat) by the clock tower (El Reloj) is on the main road, 300m east of the town center. It has 1st- and 2nd-class buses to Villahermosa (M\$54, 1½ hours, seven daily), Paraíso (M\$15, 20 minutes, 25 daily), Frontera (M\$66, 2½ hours, three daily) and more distant destinations.

Reserva de la Biósfera Pantanos de Centla

This 3030-sq-km biosphere reserve protects a good part of the wetlands around the lower reaches of two of Mexico's biggest rivers, Río Usumacinta and Río Grijalva. These lakes, marshes, rivers, mangroves, savannas and forests are an irreplaceable sanctuary for countless creatures, including the West Indian manatee and Morelet's crocodile (both endangered), six kinds of tortoise, tapir, ocelots, jaguars, howler monkeys, 60 fish species, including the *pejelagarto*, and 230 bird species – not to mention 15,000 people scattered in 90 small waterside villages.

A paved, and in parts rough, road follows the broad winding Río Usumacinta, right across the reserve from the Río Grijalva bridge near Frontera, eventually reaching the town of Jonuta (from which other roads lead to the major east-west Hwy 186). Ten kilometers along this road, **Punta Manglar** (☎ 913-403-9763; Hwy Frontera-Jonuta Km 10; ☎ 9am-4pm Tue-Sun) is an embarkation point for boat-and-foot **excursions** (☎ 913-403-9842; up to 7 people M\$500; ☎ trips 6am-7pm) into the mangroves, where you should see crocodiles, iguanas, birds and, with luck, howler monkeys.

The reserve's visitors center, the **Centro de Interpretación Uyotot-Ja** (☎ 993-313-9362; Carretera Frontera-Jonuta Km 12.5; admission M\$25; ☎ 9am-4pm Tue-Sun), is a further 2.5km along the road.

Gray *combis* and *colectivos* (shared vans) from Calle Madero in Frontera (*combis* half

EXPLORE MORE OF TABASCO

This section only scratches the surface of the adventures to be had here. For more info, visit www.lonelyplanet.com or try out some of these DIY adventures:

- **Cacao Haciendas** Discover the past at Hacienda La Luz, just west of Comalcalco's central plaza.
- **Gulf Beaches** Explore around Puerto Ceiba, where you can take boat rides into Laguna Mecoacán. Or cruise the lost roads along the **Barra de Tupilco**.
- **La Venta** While most of the cool artifacts have been moved to the museum in Villahermosa, this site, 128km west of Villahermosa, is still worth a visit.
- **Malpasito** Up in Tabasco's beautiful and mountainous far southwestern corner, tiny Malpasito is the site of mysterious ancient Zoque ruins.
- **Southern Tabasco** Explore riverside swimming holes and caves, using Teapa, 50km south of Villahermosa, as your base.

a block south of the plaza, and *colectivos* 1½ blocks south of the plaza) charge M\$10 for the 15-minute trip to Punta Manglar or Uyotot-Ja. Some continue to Jonuta (M\$50, three hours), where buses leave for Villahermosa, Palenque and other destinations.

CHIAPAS

Chilly pine forest highlands, sultry rainforest jungles and attractive colonial cities exist side by side within Mexico's southernmost state, a region awash in the legacy of Spanish rule and the remnants of ancient Maya kingdoms. The state has the second-largest indigenous population in the country, and the modern Maya of Chiapas form a direct link to the past, with a traditional culture that persists to this day. Many indigenous communities rely on subsistence farming and have no running water or electricity, and it was frustration over lack of political power and their historical mistreatment that fueled the Zapatista rebellion, putting a spotlight on the region's distinct inequities.

Chiapas contains swaths of wild green landscape that have nourished its inhabitants for centuries. From the Selva Lacandona (Lacandon Jungle) to the biosphere reserves of El Triunfo and Selva El Ocote, Chiapas offers incredible opportunities for outdoor adventures. But a rich trove of natural resources also makes it a contentious prize in a struggle for its water, lumber, and oil and gas reserves.

Dangers & Annoyances

There have been no Zapatista-related incidents affecting travelers for some time. If

you plan to travel off the main roads in the Chiapas highlands, the Ocosingo area and far eastern Chiapas, take local advice about where to avoid going. Numerous military checkpoints have increased security for travelers, though it's best to be off the Carretera Fronteriza or across the Guatemalan border before dark. Indigenous villages are often extremely close-knit, and their people can be suspicious of outsiders and particularly sensitive about having their photos taken. If in any doubt at all, ask first.

SAN CRISTÓBAL DE LAS CASAS

☎ 967 / pop 142,000 / elev 2160m

Set in a gorgeous highland valley surrounded by pine forest, the colonial city of San Cristóbal (*cris-toh-bal*) has been a popular travelers' destination for decades. It's a pleasure to explore San Cristóbal's cobbled streets and markets, soaking up the unique ambience and the wonderfully clear highland light. This medium-sized city also boasts a comfortable blend of city and countryside, with restored century-old houses giving way to grazing animals and fields of corn.

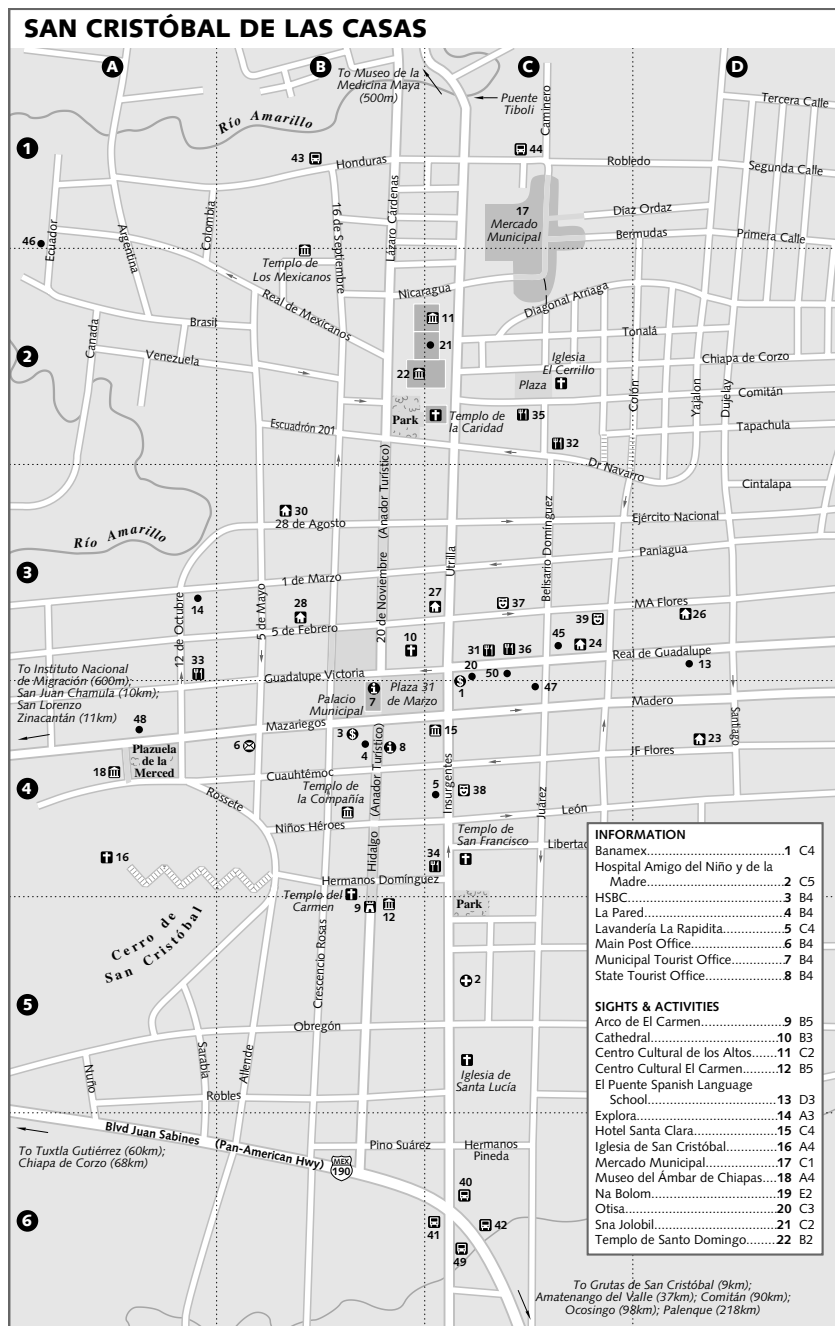
Surrounded by dozens of traditional Tzotzil and Tzeltal villages, San Cristóbal is at the heart of one of the most deeply rooted indigenous areas in Mexico. A great base for local and regional exploration, it's a place where ancient customs coexist with modern luxuries.

Orientation

San Cristóbal is very walkable, with straight streets rambling up and down several gentle hills. The Pan-American Hwy (Hwy 190, Blvd Juan Sabines, 'El Bulevar') runs through the southern part of town, and nearly all transportation terminals are on it or nearby. From

BUS SERVICES FROM VILLAHERMOSA

Destination	Fare (\$M)	Duration (hr)	Departures
Campeche	278-318	6-7	17 daily
Cancún	550-960	12-14	21 daily
Mérida	390-608	8-9	19 daily
Palenque	95	2½	13 daily
San Cristóbal de Las Casas	204	7	2 daily
Tuxtla Gutiérrez	200-240	4-8	13 daily



the OCC bus terminal, it's six blocks north up Avenida Insurgentes to the central square, Plaza 31 de Marzo. Calle Real de Guadalupe, heading east from the plaza, has a concentration of places to stay and eat. A long pedestrian mall, the Andador Turístico (or Andador Eclesiástico), runs up Avenidas Hidalgo and 20 de Noviembre from the Arco de El Carmen in the south to the Templo de Santo Domingo in the north, crossing Plaza 31 de Marzo en route. The Cerro San Cristóbal and Cerro de Guadalupe lord over the town from the west and east, respectively.

Information

San Cristóbal has dozens of inexpensive cybercafés.

Banamex (Plaza 31 de Marzo; ☎ 9am-4pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat) Has an ATM.

Hospital Amigo del Niño y de la Madre (☎ 678-0770; Av Insurgentes) General hospital with emergency facilities.

La Pared (☎ /fax 678-6367; lapared9@yahoo.com; Av Hidalgo 2; ☎ 10am-2pm & 4-8pm Mon-Sat, 3-7:30pm Sun) Stocks a great choice of new and used books in English.

Lavandería La Rapidita (☎ 678-8059; Av Insurgentes 9; self-service per 5kg M\$25, service wash per 3kg M\$45; ☎ 9am-8pm Mon-Sat)

Main post office (☎ 678-0765; Av Allende 3; ☎ 8:30am-7pm Mon-Fri, 8:30am-1pm Sat)

Municipal tourist office (☎ 678-0665; Palacio Municipal, Plaza 31 de Marzo; ☎ 8:30am-7pm Mon-Fri, 8am-8:30pm Sat & Sun)

State tourist office (☎ 678-1467; Av Hidalgo 1B; ☎ 8am-9pm Mon-Fri, 9am-8pm Sat, 9am-2pm Sun)

Has English-speaking staff and plenty of leaflets; located one floor up but no signs. It may be moving to the Centro Cultural El Carmen (p235).

Sights

PLAZA 31 DE MARZO

The leafy main plaza is a fine place to take in San Cristóbal's unhurried atmosphere. On the north side of the plaza, the **cathedral** was begun in 1528 but wasn't completed till 1815 because of several natural disasters. Sure enough, new earthquakes struck in 1816 and 1847, causing considerable damage, but it was restored again in 1920-22. The gold-leaf interior has five gilded altarpieces featuring 18th-century paintings by Miguel Cabrera. The **Hotel Santa Clara**, on the plaza's southeast corner, was built by Diego de Mazariegos, the Spanish conqueror of Chiapas. His coat of arms is engraved above the main portal. The house is a rare secular example of plateresque style in Mexico.

THE ZAPATISTAS

On January 1, 1994, the obscure day of the North American Free Trade Agreement's (NAFTA) initiation, a previously unknown leftist guerrilla army emerged from the forests to occupy San Cristóbal de Las Casas and other towns in Chiapas. The Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (EZLN; Zapatista National Liberation Army) linked antiglobalization rhetoric with Mexican revolutionary slogans, declaring that they aimed to overturn the oligarchy's centuries-old hold on land, resources and power and to improve the wretched living standards of Mexico's indigenous people.

The Mexican army evicted the Zapatistas within days, and the rebels retreated to the fringes of the Selva Lacandona (Lacandon Jungle) to wage a propaganda war, mainly fought via the internet. The Zapatistas' balaclava-clad, pipe-puffing Subcomandante Marcos (actually a former university professor named Rafael Guillén) rapidly became a cult figure. High-profile conventions against neoliberalism were held and international supporters flocked to Zapatista headquarters at La Realidad, 80km southeast of Comitán, and Zapatista-aligned peasants took over hundreds of farms and ranches in Chiapas.

In 1996 Zapatista and Mexican government negotiators agreed to a set of accords on indigenous rights and autonomy. However, the governing Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) never ratified these agreements, and through 1997 and 1998 tension and killings escalated in Chiapas. A PRI-linked paramilitary group massacred 45 people in the village of Acteal, north of San Cristóbal, in 1997. By 1999 an estimated 21,000 villagers had fled their homes after the Mexican army, aided and abetted by paramilitaries, launched a campaign of intimidation.

After Vicente Fox was elected Mexico's president in 2000, two attempts to make the necessary constitutional changes failed. The Zapatistas refused to participate in further talks, concentrating instead on consolidating their revolution and their autonomy in the villages of highland and eastern Chiapas, where they had the most support.

More recently the Zapatista leadership held three large international gatherings (Encuentros) during 2007. Pockets of the Chiapas countryside remain tense, and occasional incidents bubble up over control of land.

It's interesting to note that the Zapatistas have loudly denounced the concept of ecotourism. They see the expansion of government tourism infrastructure as a nonmilitary means to make inroads into autonomous EZLN communities.

the Spanish monarchy in those days. The interior is lavishly gilded, especially the ornate pulpit.

Around Santo Domingo and the neighboring **Templo de La Caridad** (built in 1712), Chamulan women and bohemian types from around Mexico conduct a colorful daily **crafts market**. The ex-monastery attached to Santo Domingo contains two interesting exhibits: one is the weavers' showroom of **Sna Jolobil**; the other is the **Centro Cultural de los Altos** (☎ 678-1609; Calz Lázaro Cárdenas s/n; admission M\$33, free Sun & holidays; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sun), with a reasonable Spanish-language museum on the history of the San Cristóbal region.

NA BOLOM

An atmospheric museum-research center, for many years **Na Bolom** (☎ 678-1418; www.nabolom.org; Guerrero 33; view house only M\$35, 1½hr tour in English

or Spanish regular/student M\$45/20; ☎ 10am-6pm, Spanish tour 11:30am, English tour 4:30pm, no tours Mon) was the home of Swiss anthropologist and photographer Gertrude Duby-Blom (Trudy Blom; 1901-93) and her Danish archaeologist husband Frans Blom (1893-1963).

Na Bolom means 'Jaguar House' in the Tzotzil language (as well as being a play on its former owners' name). It's full of photographs, archaeological and anthropological relics, and books.

MERCADO MUNICIPAL

For a closer look at local life – and an assault on the senses – visit San Cristóbal's busy **Mercado Municipal** (Municipal Market; ☎ approx 7am-5pm), eight blocks north of Plaza 31 de Marzo between Avenidas Utrilla and Belisario Domínguez.

MUSEO DE LA MEDICINA MAYA

The award-winning **Museo de la Medicina Maya** (Maya Medicine Museum; ☎ 678-5438; www.medicinamaya.org; Salomón González Blanco 10; admission M\$20; ☎ 10am-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-5pm Sat & Sun) introduces the system of traditional medicine used by many indigenous people in the Chiapas highlands. It's a 15-minute walk north from Calle Real de Guadalupe or M\$18 by taxi.

ARCO, TEMPLO & CENTRO CULTURAL EL CARMEN

The **Arco de El Carmen**, at the southern end of the Andador Turístico on Avenida Hidalgo, dates from the late 17th century and was once the city's gateway. The ex-convent just east is a wonderful colonial building, with a large peaceful garden. It's now the **Centro Cultural El Carmen** (Hermanos Domínguez s/n; admission free; ☎ 9am-6pm Tue-Sun), hosting art and photography exhibitions and the occasional musical event.

MUSEO DEL ÁMBAR DE CHIAPAS

Chiapas amber – fossilized pine resin, around 30 million years old – is known for its clarity and diverse colors. Most is mined around Simojovel, north of San Cristóbal. The **Museo del Ámbar de Chiapas** (Chiapas Amber Museum; www.museodelambar.com.mx; Plazuela de la Merced; admission M\$2; ☎ 10am-2pm & 4-7pm Tue-Sun) explains all things amber (with information sheets in English and other languages) and displays and sells some exquisitely carved items and insect-embedded pieces.

Courses

For language classes, contact **El Puente Spanish Language School** (☎ 678-3723; www.elpuenteweb.com; Calle Real de Guadalupe 55), which offers individual/group lessons per week for M\$2300/1900.

Tours

Recommended tour agencies include the following:

Explora (☎ 678-4295; www.ecochiapas.com; 1 de Marzo 30; ☎ 9:30am-2pm & 4-8pm Mon-Fri, 9:30am-2pm Sat) Adventure trips to the Selva Lacandona (Lacandon Jungle; four/five days M\$3600/4540, minimum four people) and more.

Otisa (☎ 678-1933; www.otisatravel.com; Calle Real de Guadalupe 3; ☎ 8am-9pm)

Festivals & Events

Semana Santa The crucifixion is acted out on Good Friday in the Barrio de Mexicanos in the northwest of town.

Feria de la Primavera y de la Paz (Spring and Peace Fair) Easter Sunday is the start of the weeklong town fair, with parades, musical events, bullfights and so on.

Festival Cervantino Barroco In late October and early November, this is a lively cultural program with music, dance and theater.

Sleeping BUDGET

Camping Rancho San Nicolás (☎ 678-0057; Prolongación León s/n; camping per person M\$50, r with shared bathroom per person M\$60, rustic cabana per person M\$60, villa d M\$350) Past cornfields and grazing horses, this grassy spot on the edge of town is a tranquil dose of *el campo* in the city. Bring a tent or trailer, or choose from a spectrum of options, including basic rooms and modern apartments with kitchens and fireplaces.

Our pick **Posada Ganesha** (☎ 678-0212; www.ganeshaposada.com; 28 de Agosto 23; s/d/tr/q with shared bathroom M\$100/160/240/320; ☎) A new incense-infused *posada* (inn) trimmed in Indian fabrics, it's a friendly and vibrant place to rest your head, with yoga and papier-mâché classes and a guest kitchen. The freestanding cabana is especially nice.

Hostal Rincón de los Camellos (☎ 967-116-0097; loscamellos@hotmail.com; Calle Real de Guadalupe 110; dm M\$60, s/d/tr/q with shared bathroom M\$140/180/230/270, with private bathroom M\$200/220/270/330) 'Camels' Corner' is a clean, tranquil little spot run by welcoming French folk. The brightly painted rooms are set round two patios, with a grassy little garden out back. A small purple kitchen

CERRO DE SAN CRISTÓBAL & CERRO DE GUADALUPE

Want to take in the best views in town? Well, you'll have to work for them, because at this altitude the stairs up these hills can be punishing. Churches crown both lookouts, and the Iglesia de Guadalupe becomes a hot spot for religious devotees around the **Día de la Virgen de Guadalupe** (December 12).

TEMPLO & EX-CONVENTO DE SANTO DOMINGO

Located just north of the city center, the 16th-century **Templo de Santo Domingo** (Avenida 20 de Noviembre; admission free; ☎ 6:30am-2pm & 4-8pm) is San Cristóbal's most beautiful church, especially when its façade catches the late-afternoon sun. This baroque frontage, with its outstanding filigree stucco work, was added in the 17th century and includes the double-headed Hapsburg eagle, symbol of

has free drinking water and coffee, and a *shisha* (waterpipe) café clad in psychedelic fabrics is a pleasant low-key hangout.

MIDRANGE

Casa Margarita (☎ 678-0957; agchincultik@hotmail.com; Calle Real de Guadalupe 34; s/d/tr/q M\$350/450/550/650; ☑) This popular and well-run travelers' haunt offers tastefully presented, impeccably clean rooms with reading lights, and a pretty courtyard at the center of things. Rates can go down by M\$50 to M\$100 in low season. There's free internet, an in-house travel agency and a good restaurant.

Hotel El Paraíso (☎ 678-0085; www.hotelposada-paraiso.com; 5 de Febrero 19; s/d/tr M\$450/650/850) Combining colonial style with a boutique-hotel feel, El Paraíso has a bright, wood-pillared patio and courtyard garden, and loads of character. The high-ceilinged rooms are not huge, and some have limited natural light, but several are bi-level with an extra bed upstairs. The in-house restaurant, L'Eden (opposite), is excellent.

Hotel Diego de Mazariegos (☎ 678-0833; www.diegodemazariegos.com; 5 de Febrero 1; s/d/tr/q M\$730/780/850/920, ste M\$1250-1500; ☑) This classy, long-established hotel occupies two 18th-century mansions built around beautiful, wide courtyards. The 76 rooms are large and decked out with traditional fabrics and fittings, but also have modern comforts, including cable TV. Some have fireplaces (M\$15 per load of wood), and suites have spa tubs. The hotel has a lively tequila-and-mariachi-theme bar.

Hotel Casavieja (☎/fax 678-6868; www.casavieja.com.mx; MA Flores 27; s/d/tr M\$800/850/900, ste M\$950-1000; ☑) Set in a beautifully renovated 18th-century house with lots of wooden pillars, balustrades and old-world atmosphere, Casavieja also boasts modern comforts. The large comfortable rooms, arranged around flowery courtyards, all have two double beds, heater, cable TV and phone.

Na Bolom (☎ 678-1418; www.nabolom.org; Guerrero 33; s/d/tr/q incl breakfast M\$660/880/1045/1100, ste M\$1210; ☑) This famous museum/research institute (p234), about 1km from the plaza, has 16 stylish guestrooms, all loaded with character and all but one with log fires. Meals are served in the house's stately dining room. Room rates include a house tour and wireless internet.

TOP END

Casa Felipe Flores (☎ 678-3996; www.felipeflores.com; JF Flores 36; r incl full breakfast US\$92-118; ☑) A dreamy colonial guesthouse decorated with outstanding Mexican and Guatemalan art, crafts and furnishings, the 200-year-old building contains five rooms with fireplace located off two flowery courtyards. The lounge is a wonderful place to sit by the fire, have a glass of wine and leaf through some of its terrific library. Room 5 is a cozy rooftop hideaway, with a private terrace looking out over tiled rooftops and clusters of bougainvillea.

Parador San Juan de Dios (☎/fax 678-1167; www.sanjuan Dios.com; Calz Roberta 16; ste M\$1400-3700; ☑) A stunning boutique hotel on the northern edge of town, the Parador San Juan de Dios offers voluminous and luxurious suites furnished with fascinating antique and modern art. The hotel occupies the former Rancho Harvard, which dates from the 17th century and has lodged many anthropologists and archaeologists. It has beautiful gardens, vast lawns, and a top-class restaurant with an inventive, expensive Chiapas/Mediterranean menu using herbs and vegetables grown in the on-site organic garden.

Eating

CALLE REAL DE GUADALUPE AREA

El Gato Gordo (☎ 678-8313; Calle Real de Guadalupe 20; mains M\$25-49; ☑) 1-11pm Wed-Mon; (V) El Gato Gordo attracts hungry travelers in droves for its excellent, well-prepared food at terrific prices. There's an unbeatable set lunch (M\$28), and excellent pastas, crêpes, Mexican snacks and meat dishes, plus a great choice of drinks.

Tierradentro (☎ 674-6766; www.tierradentro.org.mx; Calle Real de Guadalupe 24; menú M\$30-70; ☑) 8am-11pm) A popular gathering center for political progressives and coffee-swigging, laptop-toting locals (not that they're mutually exclusive), this large indoor courtyard restaurant and café is a comfortable place to while away the hours. It's run by Zapatista supporters, who hold frequent cultural events and conferences on local issues. A simple *menú compa* (fixed-price meal named for the Zapatistas; M\$30), with rice and beans and handmade tortillas, is hearty and delicious. Also inside are a good (Spanish-only) bookstore and an indigenous women's weaving co-op.

PLAZA 31 DE MARZO

Madre Tierra (☎ 678-4297; Av Insurgentes 19; mains M\$30-65; ☑) 8am-10pm; (V) A long-time travelers' favorite, Madre Tierra serves an eclectic and mainly vegetarian menu on a tranquil patio or in an atmospheric dining room. Breakfasts are superb, but perhaps sliding by on its reputation; other meals can be hit-or-miss.

L'Eden (☎ 678-0085; Hotel El Paraíso, 5 de Febrero 19; mains M\$45-110; ☑) 7am-noon & 1-11pm) This quality restaurant's tempting European and Mexican menu includes *fondue suiza* (Swiss fondue), *sopa azteca* (tortilla soup) and succulent meat dishes. There's a lengthy wine list, too, including French and Spanish vintages.

Pizzeria El Punto (☎ 678-7979; Comitán 13; pizzas M\$60-100; ☑) 2-11pm Tue-Sun) Forget the cardboard crap that passes for pizzas in some parts, these crispy pies are the best in town, bar none.

Drinking & Entertainment

Check out **Café Museo Café** (☎ 678-7876; MA Flores 10; ☑) 7am-10pm), **DaDa Club** (☎ 631-3293; www.dadajazz.com; Av Insurgentes 16A; ☑) 1pm-midnight Mon-Sat) or **La Pera** (☎ 678-1209; MA Flores 23; ☑) 1-11pm Mon-Sat) for live music.

Getting There & Away

On the corner of the Pan-American Hwy, the **Instituto Nacional de Migración** (☎ 678-0292; Diagonal El Centenario 30) is 1.2km west of the OCC bus terminal.

From Tuxtla Gutiérrez you'll most likely travel here on the fast new toll highway (M\$33 for cars). See p243 for a warning about Hwy 199 from San Cristóbal to Palenque.

AIR

San Cristóbal's airport, about 15km from town on the Palenque road, has no regular passenger flights; the main airport serving

town is in Tuxtla Gutiérrez. To get there, take a Tuxtla-bound *colectivo* to Soriana (M\$35, 1¼ hours) in Tuxtla's eastern suburbs; from the stand at the *colectivo* stop, hire a taxi to the airport (M\$150, 30 minutes). A number of tour agencies, including Viajes Chincultik and **Otisa** (☎ 678-1933; www.otisatravel.com; Calle Real de Guadalupe 3), run shuttles to the Tuxtla airport for M\$150 to M\$160 per person, but scheduled service is generally at 9am only. Reserve in advance, especially if you want to leave at another time.

Mexicana de Aviación (☎ 678-9309; Belisario Domínguez 2B) sells direct flights from Tuxtla Gutiérrez to Mexico City, and connecting flights to Villahermosa, Mérida and Cancún.

BUS, COLECTIVO & VAN

San Cristóbal has around a dozen bus terminals, mostly on or just off the Pan-American Hwy. Most important for travelers is the 1st-class **OCC bus terminal** (☎ 678-0291; cnr Pan-American Hwy & Av Insurgentes), also used by ADO and UNO 1st-class and deluxe buses, and 2nd-class Transportes Dr Rodolfo Figueroa (TRF) and Rápidos del Sur. Tickets for all of these lines are sold at **Ticket Bus** (☎ 678-8503; Calle Real de Guadalupe 5A; ☑) 7am-10pm) in the city center.

First-class **AEXA** (☎ 678-6178) and 2nd-class Ómnibus de Chiapas share a bus terminal on the south side of the highway; and various Suburban-type vans and *colectivo* services have depots on the highway in the same area. Daily departures are listed in the table (below).

For Guatemala, most agencies offer daily van service to Quetzaltenango (M\$260, eight hours), Panajachel (M\$260, 10 hours), Antigua (M\$360, 12 hours) and Flores (via Palenque, M\$400).

BUS SERVICES FROM SAN CRISTÓBAL DE LAS CASAS

Destination	Fare (\$M)	Duration (hr)	Departures
Campeche	314	11	1 OCC bus
Cancún	606-724	16-18	4 OCC buses
Ciudad Cuauhtémoc (Guatemalan border)	100	3½	4 OCC buses
Mérida	448	13	1 OCC bus
Palenque	75-134	5	9 OCC buses & 3 AEXA buses
Villahermosa	194	7-8	2 OCC buses

CAR

For car rental, **Optima** (☎ 674-5409; optimacar1@hotmail.com; Mazariegos 39) has VW Beetles for M\$400/2400 per day/week.

Getting Around

Combis go up Crescencio Rosas from the Pan-American Hwy to the city center. Taxis cost M\$18 within the city.

Friendly **Los Pingüinos** (☎ 678-0202; www.bike-mexico.com/pinguinos; Ecuador 4B; bike hire per 4/6/9hr M\$100/130/150; ☎ phone 8am-8pm, office 10am-2:30pm & 3:30-7pm Mon-Sat) rents good-quality mountain bikes.

Crozy Scooters (☎ 631-4329; www.prodigyweb.net.mx/crozyscooters; Belisario Domínguez 7; scooter hire per 1/5/9/24hr M\$75/200/250/350; ☎ 9am-7pm), under new ownership, rents well-maintained 80cc scooters.

AROUND SAN CRISTÓBAL

The inhabitants of the beautiful Chiapas highlands are descended from the ancient Maya and maintain some unique customs, costumes and beliefs. It's particularly important to be respectful of local customs in this part of Mexico.

While walking or riding by horse or bicycle by day along the main roads to San Juan Chamula and San Lorenzo Zinacantán should not be risky, it's not wise to wander into un-frequented areas or down isolated tracks.

Transportation to most villages goes from points around the Mercado Municipal in San Cristóbal. **Combis** to San Juan Chamula (M\$8) leave from Calle Honduras frequently from 4am to about 6pm; for Zinacantán, **combis** (M\$10) and **colectivos** (M\$12) go at least hourly from 5am to 7pm, from a yard off Robledo.

San Juan Chamula

pop 3000 / elev 2200m

The Chamulans are a fiercely independent Tzotzil group, about 80,000 strong. Their main village, San Juan Chamula, is 10km northwest of San Cristóbal.

Outsiders can visit San Juan Chamula, but a big sign at the entrance to the village strictly forbids photography in the village church or at rituals. Do *not* ignore these restrictions; the community takes them very seriously. Nearby, around the shell of an older church, is the village **graveyard**, with black crosses for people who died old, white for the young and blue for others.

On Sunday the weekly **market** is held, when people from the hills stream into the village to shop, trade and visit the main church. Standing beside the main plaza, Chamula's main church, the **Templo de San Juan**, is a ghostly white, with a vividly painted arch of green and blue. A sign tells visitors to obtain tickets (M\$15) at the **tourist office** (☎ 9am-6pm), beside the plaza, before entering the church. Inside the darkened sanctuary, hundreds of flickering candles, clouds of incense and worshippers kneeling with their faces to the pine-needle-carpeted floor make a powerful impression.

San Lorenzo Zinacantán

pop 3700 / elev 2558m

The orderly village of San Lorenzo Zinacantán, about 11km northwest of San Cristóbal, is the main village of the Zinacantán municipality (population 45,000). Zinacantán people, like Chamulans, are Tzotzil.

A small **market** is held on Sunday until noon, and during fiesta times. The huge central **Iglesia de San Lorenzo** (admission M\$20) was rebuilt following a fire in 1975. Photography is banned in the church and churchyard. The small thatched-roof **Museo Jzot' Levetik** (admission by donation; ☎ 9am-5pm), three blocks below the central basketball court, covers local culture and has some fine textiles and musical instruments.

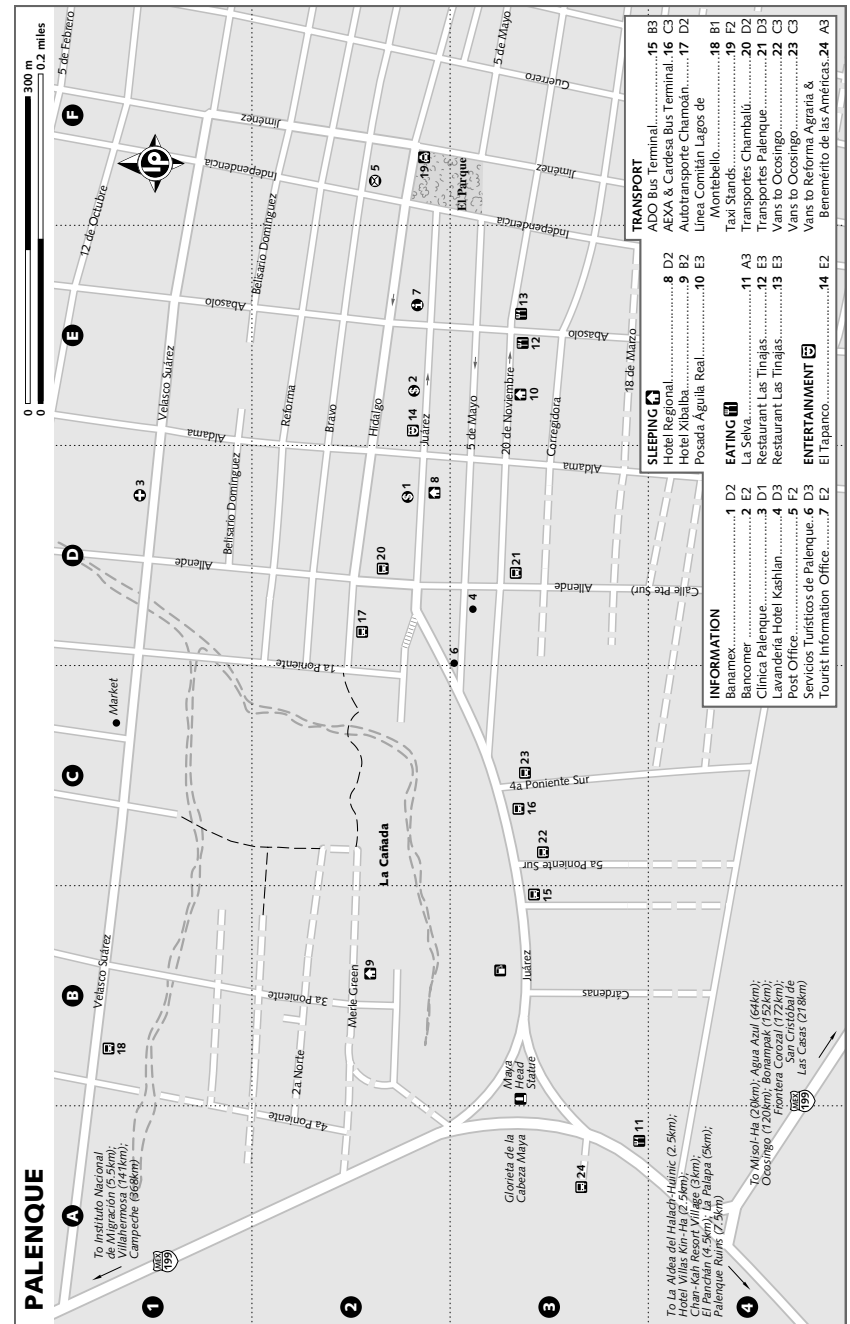
PALENQUE

☎ 916 / pop 37,000 / elev 80m

Deservedly one of the top destinations of Chiapas, the soaring jungle-swathed temples of Palenque are a national treasure and one of the best examples of Maya architecture in Mexico. Modern Palenque town, a few kilometers to the east, is a sweaty, humdrum place without much appeal except as a jumping-off point for the ruins. Many prefer to base themselves at one of the forest hideouts along the road between the town and the ruins, including the funky travelers' hangout of El Panchán.

The name Palenque (Palisade) is Spanish and has no relation to the city's ancient name, which may have been Lakamha (Big Water). Palenque was first occupied around 100 BC, and flourished from around AD 630 to 740. The city rose to prominence under the ruler Pakal, who reigned from AD 615-83.

Pakal's son Kan B'alam II (684-702), who is represented in hieroglyphics by the jaguar and the serpent (and also called Jaguar



Serpent II), continued Palenque's expansion and artistic development. He presided over the construction of the Grupo de las Cruces temples, placing sizable narrative stone stelae within each.

During Kan B'alam II's reign, Palenque extended its zone of control to Río Usumacinta, but was challenged by the rival Maya city of Toniná, 65km south. Kan B'alam's brother and successor, K'an Joy Chitam II (Precious Peccary), was captured by forces from Toniná in 711, and probably executed there. Palenque enjoyed a resurgence between 722 and 736 under Ahkal Mo' Nahb' III (Turtle Macaw Lake), who added many substantial buildings.

Orientation

Hwy 199 meets Palenque's main street, Avenida Juárez, at the Glorieta de la Cabeza Maya, an intersection with a large statue of a Maya chieftain's head, at the west end of the town. From here Avenida Juárez heads 1km east to the central square, El Parque. The main bus terminals are on Avenida Juárez just east of the Maya head statue.

A few hundred meters south from the Maya head statue, the paved road to the Palenque ruins, 7.5km away, diverges west off Hwy 199. This road passes the Museo de Sitio (Site Museum) after about 6.5km, then winds about 1km further to the main entrance of the ruins.

Accommodations are scattered around the central part of town and along the road to the ruins. The commercial heart of town, where you'll hardly ever see another tourist, is north of the center along Avenida Velasco Suárez.

Information

There are over a dozen cybercafés; rates cost M\$50 to M\$80 per hour.

Banamex (Av Juárez 62; ☎ 9am-4pm Mon-Fri) Has an ATM.

Clinica Palenque (☎ 345-0273; Av Velasco Suárez 33; ☎ 7am-11pm) Dr Alfonso Martínez speaks English.

Lavandería Hotel Kashlan (5 de Mayo 105; per 1-3kg M\$50)

Maya Exploration Center (www.mayaexploration.org) Provides lectures, slide shows and documentary films on weekends in the main tourism seasons.

Post office (Independencia s/n; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat)

Servicios Turísticos de Palenque (☎ 345-1340; www.stpalenque.com; cnr Av Juárez & 5 de Mayo) A tour agency.

Tourist information office (cnr Av Juárez & Abasolo; ☎ 9am-9pm Mon-Sat, 9am-1pm Sun)

Palenque Ruins

Ancient **Palenque** (admission M\$45, 2hr guided tour M\$650-700; ☎ 8am-5pm, last entry 4:30pm) stands at the precise point where the first hills rise out of the Gulf Coast plain, and the dense jungle covering these hills forms an evocative backdrop to Palenque's exquisite Maya architecture. Hundreds of ruined buildings are spread over 15 sq km, but only a fairly compact central area has been excavated. The ruins and surrounding forests form a national park, the Parque Nacional Palenque, for which you must pay a separate M\$20 admission fee at Km 4.5 on the road to the ruins.

Palenque's **Museo de Sitio** (Site Museum; ☎ 348-9331; Carretera Palenque-Ruinas Km 7; admission free; ☎ 9am-4:30pm Tue-Sun) is worth a wander, displaying finds from the site and interpreting, in English and Spanish, Palenque's history.

Transportes Chambalú (☎ 345-2849; Allende s/n) and **Transportes Palenque** (☎ 345-2430; cnr Allende & 20 de Noviembre) run *combis* from Palenque town to the ruins about every 15 minutes from 6am to 7pm daily (M\$10 each way). They will pick you up or drop you anywhere along the town-to-ruins road.

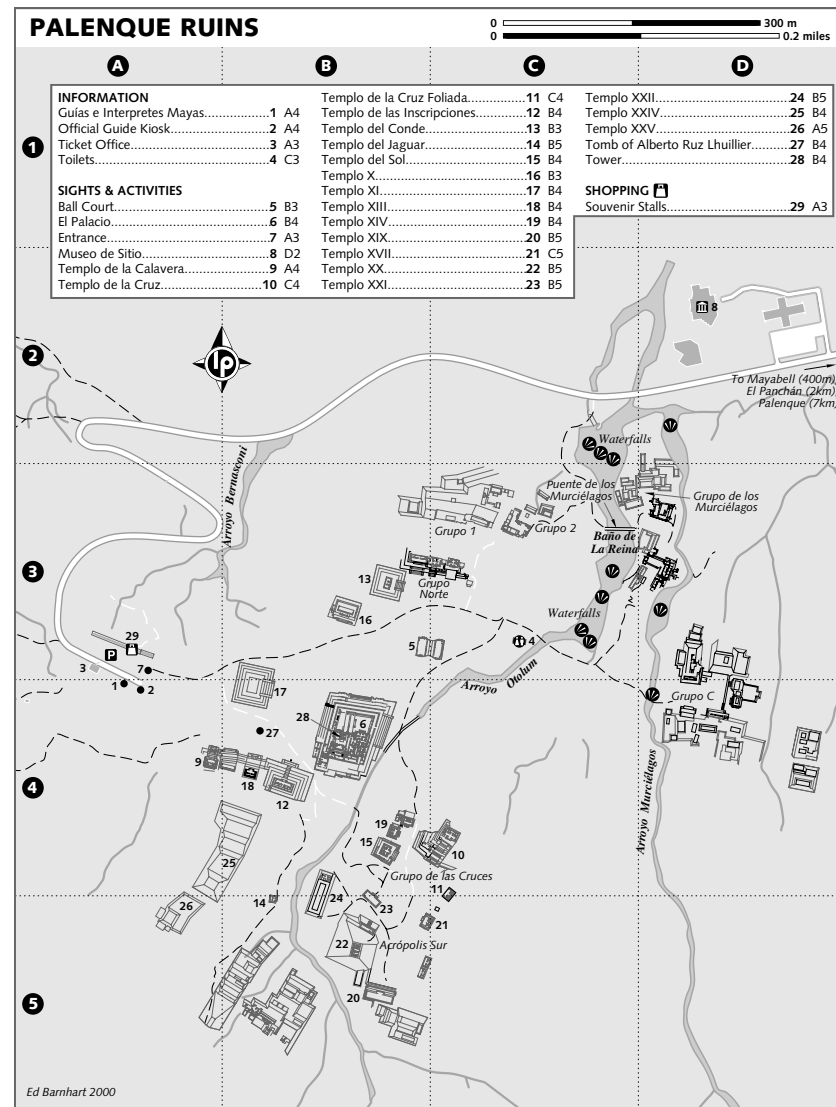
Note that the mushrooms sold by locals along the road to the ruins from about May to November are of the hallucinogenic variety.

EXPLORING THE SITE

As you enter the site, a line of temples rises in front of the jungle on your right, culminating about 100m ahead at the **Templo de las Inscripciones** (Temple of the Inscriptions), the tallest and most stately of Palenque's buildings. From the top, interior stairs lead down into the tomb of Pakal (closed indefinitely to avoid further damage from the humidity exuded by visitors). Pakal's jewel-bedecked skeleton and jade mosaic death mask were moved from the tomb to Mexico City, and the tomb was re-created in the Museo Nacional de Antropología (from where the priceless death mask was stolen in 1985), but the carved stone sarcophagus lid remains at the Museo de Sitio.

Diagonally opposite the Templo de las Inscripciones is **El Palacio** (The Palace), a large structure divided into four main courtyards, with a maze of corridors and rooms. Soon after the death of his father, Pakal's son Kan B'alam II (684-702) started designing the temples of the **Grupo de las Cruces** (Group of the Crosses). All three main pyramid-

shaped structures surround a plaza south-east of the Templo de las Inscripciones. The **Templo del Sol** (Temple of the Sun), on the west side of the plaza, has the best-preserved roofcomb at Palenque. Steep steps climb to the **Templo de la Cruz** (Temple of the Cross), the largest and most elegantly proportioned in this group.



South of the Grupo de las Cruces is the **Acrópolis Sur**, where archaeologists have recovered some terrific finds in recent excavations. It appears to have been constructed as an extension of the Grupo de las Cruces, with both groups set around what was probably a single long, open space.

Sleeping

The first choice to make is whether you want to stay in or out of Palenque town. Most out-of-town places, including **El Panchán** (www.elpanchan.com; Carretera Palenque-Ruinas Km 4.5), are along the road to the ruins.

IN TOWN

Hotel Regional (☎ /fax 345-0183; www.regionalpalenque.com; Av Juárez 119; s/d/tr/q with fan M\$180/230/320/420, tr/q with air-con M\$400/500; 🏠) Something slightly different from the run of the Avenida Juárez mill: bright paintwork and extremely bright murals enliven two floors of rooms set around a courtyard with a turtle pond.

Posada Águila Real (☎ 345-0004; Av 20 de Noviembre s/n; s/d M\$350/400, tr M\$450-500; 🏠) Seventeen spotless, well-kept, blue-and-yellow rooms are arranged on three floors based around an open-air patio. There's a small café-restaurant, too.

Hotel Xibalba (☎ 345-0411; www.hotelxibalba.com; Merle Green 9; r M\$550, tr/q M\$600/700; 🏠) Preened to perfection by a loving owner, the Xibalba enjoys a tranquil location in two buildings (one in an imitation of the ancient Maya corbel roof style, the other with a full-size replica of the lid from Pakal's sarcophagus).

THE SELVA LACONDONA

The Selva Lacandona (Lacandon Jungle), in eastern Chiapas, occupies just one quarter of 1% of Mexico. Yet it contains more than 4300 plant species, 450 types of butterfly, at least 340 birds and 163 mammals. Among these are such emblematic creatures as the jaguar, red macaw, white turtle, tapir and harpy eagle.

This great fund of natural resources and genetic diversity is the southwest end of the Selva Maya, a 30,000-sq-km corridor of tropical rainforest stretching from Chiapas across northern Guatemala into Belize and the southern Yucatán. But the Selva Lacandona is shrinking fast, under pressure from ranchers, loggers, oil prospectors and farmers desperate for land. From around 15,000 sq km in the 1950s, an estimated 3000 to 4500 sq km of jungle remains today. Most of what's left is in the Reserva de la Biósfera Montes Azules and the neighboring Reserva de la Biósfera Lacan-tun.

The Mexican government deeded a large section of the land to a small number of Lacandón families in the 1970s, creating tensions with other indigenous communities whose claims were put aside. Land within the region remains incredibly contested.

OUTSIDE TOWN

Margarita & Ed Cabañas (☎ 348-4205; El Panchán; cabañas r M\$170, r with fan M\$250-300, r with air-con M\$350, tr/q with air-con M\$500; 🏠) Teeming with local information, Margarita has welcomed travelers to her exceptionally homey place in the jungle for more than 10 years. Bright, clean and cheerful rooms have good mosquito netting, and the more rustic screened cabañas are well kept, too.

Hotel Villas Kin-Ha (☎ 345-0533; www.villaskinha.com; Carretera Palenque-Ruinas Km 2.7; r M\$660-800, ste M\$1320; 🏠) Most accommodations are palm-thatched and wood-beamed, and all have air-con. The grounds hold two good pools, an open-sided *palapa* (thatched-roof shelter) restaurant and a theater.

Chan-Kah Resort Village (☎ 345-1100; www.chan-kah.com.mx; Carretera Palenque-Ruinas Km 3; t/ste US\$120/330; 🏠) Swimmers will go woozy contemplating the Chan-Kah's stupendous 70m stone-lined swimming pool in lush jungle gardens. A quality resort on the road to the ruins, 3km from town, it has handsome, well-spaced, wood-and-stone cottages with generous bathrooms, ceiling fans, terrace and air-con.

Eating

Cafeteria Motiepa (Carretera Palenque-Ruinas Km 6; snacks M\$20-40; ☎ 8am-3pm) Next to the Museo de Sitio near the Palenque ruins, this is a good stop for a snack or drink.

Restaurant Las Tinajas (☎ 345-4970; cnr 20 de Noviembre & Abasolo; mains M\$50-100; ☎ 7am-11pm) It doesn't take long to figure out why this place is always busy. It slings enormous portions of

BUS SERVICES FROM PALENQUE

Destination	Fare (\$M)	Duration (hr)	Departures
Campeche	226-230	4½-5½	4 ADO buses
Cancún	498-584	13-14	5 ADO buses
Mérida	316-346	8	4 ADO buses
San Cristóbal de Las Casas	75-142	5¼	10 ADO buses & 5 AEXA buses
Villahermosa	50-98	2	12 ADO buses & 11 AEXA buses

excellent homestyle food, enough to keep you (and possibly another person) fueled up for hours. Note: there is another branch on the opposite side of the intersection.

La Selva (☎ 345-0363; Hwy 199; mains M\$50-160; ☎ 11:30am-11:30pm) Palenque's most upscale restaurant serves up well-prepared steaks, seafood, salads and *antojitos* ('little whims,' corn- and tortilla-based snacks) under an enormous *palapa* roof.

Don Mucho's (☎ 341-8209; El Panchán; mains M\$55-110) The hot spot of El Panchán, popular Don Mucho's provides great-value meals in a jungle setting, with a candlelit atmosphere at night.

Entertainment

Palenque doesn't have much of a nightlife scene. But you can try **El Tapanco** (☎ 345-0415; Av Juárez 65C) or **La Palapa** (Carretera Palenque-Ruinas Km 5; ☎ until 4am) for dancing and live music.

Getting There & Away

Palenque's airport, 3km north of town along Hwy 199, has been closed to regular passenger flights for several years.

Highway holdups were once weekly occurrences on Hwy 199 between Ocosingo and Palenque, but an increased military and police presence has made this route pretty safe now. Still, most people consider daytime travel to be best.

The main **ADO bus terminal** (☎ 345-1344; Av Juárez s/n) has deluxe and 1st-class services; it's also used by OCC (1st-class) and TRF (2nd-class) bus lines. The **AEXA bus terminal** (☎ 345-2630; Av Juárez 159), with 1st-class buses, and Cardesa (2nd class), is located 1½ blocks east, with an on-site internet café. Vans to Ocosingo wait on 4a Poniente Sur and 5a Poniente Sur, near the bus terminals, and leave when full. **Transportes Palenque** (☎ 345-2430; cnr Allende & 20 de Noviembre) runs vans to Tenosique.

For a sample of daily departures, see the table (above).

Getting Around

Taxis wait at the northeast corner of El Parque and at the ADO bus terminal; they charge M\$40 to El Panchán or Mayabell, and M\$50 to the ruins.

BONAMPK & YAXCHILÁN

The ancient Maya cities of Bonampak and Yaxchilán, southeast of Palenque, are easily accessible thanks to the Carretera Fronteriza, a good paved road running parallel to the Mexico-Guatemala border, all the way from Palenque to the Parque Nacional Lagunas de Montebello (Lagos de Montebello), around the fringe of the Selva Lacandona. Bonampak, famous for its frescoes, is 148km by road from Palenque; the bigger and more important Yaxchilán, with a peerless jungle setting beside the broad and swift Río Usumacinta, is 173km by road, then about 22km by boat.

Tours

While independent travel is certainly possible in this region, most choose to take an organized tour from Palenque (p240).

Getting There & Away

From Palenque, Autotransporte Chamoán runs vans to Frontera Corozal (M\$60, 2½ to three hours, 13 times daily), and vans to Benemérito de las Américas (M\$60, 3½ hours, every 40 minutes from 4am to 5:30pm) depart from a terminus on Hwy 199 just south of the Maya head statue.

Línea Comitán Lagos de Montebello (☎ 916-345-1260; Av Velasco Suárez s/n), two blocks west of the Palenque market, runs vans to Benemérito (M\$60, 10 times daily from 4am to 2:45pm), with the first five services (4am, 5:30am, 7:15am, 8:45am and 10:15am) continuing around the Carretera Fronteriza to the Lagos de Montebello (M\$160, seven hours to Tzicacao) and Comitán (M\$170, eight hours).

All these services stop at San Javier (M\$45, two hours), the turnoff for Lacanjá

Chansayab and Bonampak, 140km from Palenque; and at Crucero Corozal (M\$50, 2½ hours), the intersection for Frontera Corozal.

There are no gas stations on the Carretera Fronteriza, but plenty of entrepreneurial locals sell reasonably priced gasoline from large plastic containers.

Bonampak

The site of **Bonampak** (admission M\$37; ☎ 8am-4:45pm) spreads over 2.4 sq km, but all the main ruins stand around the rectangular Gran Plaza. Never a major city, Bonampak spent most of the Classic period under Yaxchilán's sphere of influence. The most impressive surviving monuments were built under Chan Muwan II, a nephew of the Yaxchilán's Itzamnaaj B'alam II, who acceded to Bonampak's throne in AD 776. The 6m-high **Stela 1** in the Gran Plaza depicts Chan Muwan holding a ceremonial staff at the height of his reign. He also features in **Stela 2** and **Stela 3** on the Acropolis, which rises from the south end of the plaza.

However, it's the vivid frescoes inside the modest-looking **Templo de las Pinturas** (Edificio 1) that have given Bonampak its fame – and its name, which means 'Painted Walls' in Yucatecan Maya.

The Bonampak site abuts the Reserva de la Biósfera Montes Azules, and is rich in wildlife. Drinks and snacks are sold at the entrance to the Monumento Natural Bonampak protected zone, 8km before the ruins, and by the archaeological site entrance.

Visitors to Bonampak can stay in the neighboring village of Frontera Corozal. **Escudo Jaguar** (☎ 502-5353-5637; http://mx.geocities.com/hotel_escudojaguar; camping per person M\$70, cabana with shared bathroom d/tr M\$200/258, cabana with 1/2/3 d beds M\$380/572/760; 📍) has solidly built, pink, thatched cabanas, which are all kept spotless and come equipped with fans and mosquito nets.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Bonampak is 12km from San Javier on the Carretera Fronteriza. The first 3km, to the Lacanjá Chansayab turnoff, is paved, and the rest is good gravel/dirt road through the forest. Taxis will take you from San Javier or the Lacanjá turnoff to the ruins and back for M\$70 per person, including waiting time. Private vehicles cannot pass the Monumento Natural Bonampak entrance, 1km past the Lacanjá turnoff, but you can rent bicycles there for M\$60 for three hours, or take a *combi* to the ruins for M\$70 round-trip.

Yaxchilán

Jungle-shrouded **Yaxchilán** (admission M\$45; ☎ 8am-4:30pm, last entry 3:30pm) has a terrific setting above a horseshoe loop in the Río Usumacinta. The control this location gave it over river commerce, and a series of successful alliances and conquests, made Yaxchilán one of the most important Classic Maya cities in the Usumacinta region. Archaeologically, Yaxchilán is famed for its ornamented façades and roofcombs, and its impressive stone

INDIGENOUS PEOPLES OF CHIAPAS

Of the 4.2 million people of Chiapas, approximately 1.25 million are indigenous, with language being the key ethnic identifier. Each of the eight principal groups has its own language, beliefs and customs. Travelers to the area around San Cristóbal are most likely to encounter the Tzotziles and the Tzeltals. Their traditional religious life is nominally Catholic, but integrates pre-Hispanic elements. Most people live in the hills outside the villages, which are primarily market and ceremonial centers.

Tzotzil and Tzeltal clothing is among the most varied, colorful and elaborately worked in Mexico. It not only identifies wearers' villages but also carries on ancient Maya traditions. Many of the seemingly abstract designs on these costumes are, in fact, stylized snakes, frogs, butterflies, birds, saints and other beings.

The Lacandones dwelt deep in the Selva Lacandona and largely avoided contact with the outside world until the 1950s. They now number 800 or so and live in three main settlements in that same region, with low-key tourism being one of their major means of support. Lacandones are readily recognizable in their white tunics and long black hair cut in a fringe. Most Lacandones have now abandoned their traditional animist religion in favor of Presbyterian or evangelical forms of Christianity.

EXPLORE MORE OF CHIAPAS

This short chapter only touches the surface. For more information, check out our comprehensive coverage in *Mexico* or download a pdf copy at www.shop.lonelyplanet.com. Or better yet, leave the guidebook behind and try out some of these DIY adventures:

- **Agua Azul & Misol-Ha** These spectacular water attractions – the thundering cascades of Agua Azul and the 35m jungle waterfall of Misol-Ha (www.misol-ha.com) – are both short detours off the Ocosingo–Palenque road.
- **Amatenango del Valle** The women of this Tzeltal village by the Pan-American Hwy, 37km southeast of San Cristóbal, are renowned potters.
- **Chiapa de Corzo** Set 12km east of Tuxtla Gutiérrez on the way to San Cristóbal, Chiapa de Corzo is a small and attractive colonial town with an easygoing, provincial air. Set on the north bank of the broad Río Grijalva, it's the main starting point for trips into the **Cañón del Sumidero**.
- **Grutas de San Cristóbal** The entrance to this long cavern is among pine woods 9km south-east of San Cristóbal, a five-minute walk south of the Pan-American Hwy.
- **Lacanjá Chansayab** The largest Lacandón Maya village is 12km from Bonampak. Its family compounds are scattered around a wide area, many of them with creeks or even the Río Lacanjá flowing past their grassy grounds. The website www.ecochiapas.com/lacanja (in Spanish) offers information on visiting the region.
- **Lagos de Montebello** The temperate pine and oak forest along the Guatemalan border east of Chinkultic is dotted with over 50 small lakes of varied hues. The nearby **Chinkultic ruins** add to the mystery.
- **Laguna Miramar** Ringed by rainforest 140km southeast of Ocosingo in the Reserva de la Biósfera Montes Azules, this is one of Mexico's most remote and exquisite lakes.
- **Ocosingo** A respite from both the steamy lowland jungle and the chilly highlands, the bustling regional market town of Ocosingo sits in a gorgeous and broad temperate valley midway between San Cristóbal and Palenque. The impressive Maya ruins of **Toniná** are just a few kilometers away.
- **Reserva de la Biósfera El Triunfo** The luxuriant cloud forests high in the remote Sierra Madre de Chiapas are a bird-lover's paradise.
- **Reserva de la Biósfera La Encrucijada** This large biosphere reserve protects a 1448-sq-km strip of coastal lagoons, sand bars and wetlands.
- **Sima de Las Cotorras** This is a dramatic sinkhole (☎ 968-689-0289; simacotorras@hotmail.com) punching 160m wide and 140m deep into the earth. It's about 1½ hours from Tuxtla Gutiérrez.

lintels carved with conquest and ceremonial scenes. A flashlight (torch) is helpful for exploring some parts of the site.

Yaxchilán peaked in power and splendor between AD 681 and 800 under the rulers Itzamnaaj B'alam II (Shield Jaguar II, 681–742), Pájaro Jaguar IV (Bird Jaguar IV, 752–68) and Itzamnaaj B'alam III (Shield Jaguar III, 769–800). The city was abandoned around 810.

As you walk toward the ruins, a signed path to the right leads up to the **Pequeña Acrópolis**, a group of ruins on a small hilltop – you can visit this later. Staying on the main path, you

soon reach the mazy passages of **El Laberinto** (Edificio 19), built between 742–52, during the interregnum between Itzamnaaj B'alam II and Pájaro Jaguar IV. Dozens of bats shelter under the structure's roof today. From this complicated two-level building you emerge at the northwest end of the extensive **Gran Plaza**.

Though it's hard to imagine anyone here ever wanting to be hotter than they already were, **Edificio 17** was apparently a sweat house. About halfway along the plaza, **Stela 1**, flanked by weathered sculptures of a crocodile and a jaguar, shows Pájaro Jaguar IV in a ceremony that took place in 761. **Edificio 20**, from the time

of Itzamnaaj B'alam III, was the last significant structure built at Yaxchilán; its lintels are now in Mexico City. **Stela 11**, at the northeast corner of the Gran Plaza, was originally found in front of Edificio 40. The bigger of the two figures visible on it is Pájaro Jaguar IV.

An imposing stairway climbs from Stela 1 to **Edificio 33**, the best-preserved temple at Yaxchilán, with about half of its roofcomb intact. The final step in front of the building is carved with ball-game scenes, and splendid relief carvings embellish the undersides of the lintels. Inside is a statue of Pájaro Jaguar IV, minus his head, which he lost to treasure-seeking 19th-century timber cutters.

From the clearing behind Edificio 33, a path leads into the trees. About 20m along this, fork left uphill; go left at another fork after about 80m, and in some 10 minutes, mostly going uphill, you'll reach three buildings on a hilltop: **Edificio 39**, **Edificio 40** and **Edificio 41**. Climb to the top of Edificio 41 for great views across the top of the jungle to the distant mountains of Guatemala.

Visitors can stay in the village of Lacanja Chansayab. At **Campamento Río Lacanja** (www.ecochiapas.com/lacanja; bunk M\$120, d M\$290, Ya'ax Can r/tr/q M\$480/580/650; (P)), 2km south of the central intersection, rustic semi-open-air wood-frame cabanas, with mosquito nets, stand close to the jungle-shrouded Río Lacanja. A separate group of large rooms with fan, called Cabañas Ya'ax Can, have two solid wooden double beds, tiled floors and hot-water bathroom.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

River *lanchas* (motorboats) take 40 minutes running downstream from Frontera Corozal and one hour to return. *Lancha* outfits, with desks in a thatched-roof building near the Frontera Corozal embarcadero, all charge the same price for trips (return journey with 2½ hours at the ruins for three/four/seven/10 people M\$650/780/950/1300). *Lanchas* normally depart frequently until 1:30pm or so, and it's sometimes possible to hook up with other travelers or a tour group to share costs.