

Hours

36 Hours in Mérida, Mexico



Adriana Zehbrauskas for The New York Times

From left: A traditional Yucatecan dish served in the Chaya Maya restaurant; a traditional folk dance presentation, every Saturday night in an open air stage at the Remate Paseo Montejo; people ride bicycles on Paseo Montejo, which are closed for cars on Sundays. [More Photos »](#)

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YUCATECANS are fiercely proud of their culture, sprinkling their Spanish with Mayan words and quick to recount the stories of resistance and revolution that set this region apart from the rest of [Mexico](#) for centuries. Somehow, those tales seem a little distant now in

Yucatán's capital, Mérida, a languid city of pastel mansions and evening promenades. The city, now one of the safest in Mexico, is an architectural jewel, and has one of the country's largest historic centers outside [Mexico City](#). Block after block of houses dating to the mid-19th century and earlier are in the midst of a restoration boom, and the city's cultural and restaurant scenes are flourishing.

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Friday

3 p.m.

1. YUCATECAN FEAST

Sample Yucatecan cuisine at the Hacienda Teya (Mérida-Cancún Highway, Kilometer 12.5; 52-999-988-0800; haciendateya.com), a 17th-century plantation that switched from cattle to henequen, used for making rope, at the end of the 19th century, and is just a 15-minute drive from downtown. From the colonial dining room, with walls that are filled with old photographs of Mérida in the early 1900s, the view stretches to the brilliant flamboyant trees that fringe the expansive grounds. Try the classics: sopa de lima, a fragrant chicken and tortilla soup flavored with lime juice (54 pesos, or about \$4, at 13.7 pesos to the dollar); cochinita pibil, tangy slow-roasted pork marinated in citrus and a paste made from achiote seeds; or poc chuc, grilled pork

marinated in sour orange juice (both 124 pesos).

5 p.m.

2. PROMENADE IN THE PLAZA

In the late afternoon, the whole city, it seems, congregates in the leafy Plaza Grande under the towers of Mérida's austere 16th-century Cathedral of San Ildefonso. Have a sorbet at Sorbetería Colón on the north side (along 61st Street), then wander into the Governor's Palace next door and take in the giant paintings depicting Yucatán's violent history by the 20th-century Mérida-born artist Fernando Castro Pacheco. The Casa Montejo (506 63rd Street, 52-999-923-0633; museocasamontejo.com) on the south side, now a cultural center and museum, is the city's oldest building, erected by Don Francisco Montejo, Yucatán's conquistador, in the 1540s. Look for the carving of two Spanish conquistadors standing atop the heads of Indians on the facade. The four front rooms have been sumptuously restored to late-19th-century splendor. The gift shop sells excellent handicrafts. As night falls, walk north a few blocks to the small church of La Tercera Orden on the corner of 59th and 60th Streets, built by the Jesuits in 1618. You may catch a wedding or a quinceañera Mass.

9 p.m.

3. MOJITOS BY STARLIGHT

The outdoor bar at the Piedra de Agua hotel (498 60th Street, 52-999-924-2300; piedradeagua.com) has a spectacular view of the brilliantly lighted cathedral towers. Local groups play jazz and blues on Fridays. The specialties are mojitos (48 pesos) and lemon daiquiris accented with basil leaves (55 pesos). Try a pizza topped with huitlacoche, Mexico's signature corn fungus (120 pesos).

Saturday

9 a.m.

4. CURBSIDE BREAKFAST

The Loría family have run the Wayan'e street stand for 20 years (92E 20th Street at 15th Street, Colonia Itzimmá, 52-999-927-4160). They serve savory tacos and tortas throughout the morning, scooping fragrant fillings like smoky chicken fajitas and scrambled eggs with acelgas (Swiss chard) out of clay pots to customers seated at a stainless steel counter. All dishes are from 8 to 12 pesos.

11 a.m.

5. FROZEN IN TIME

During the henequen boom, when the agave plant was turned into rope for the world, Yucatán's aristocratic landowners built magnificent houses, many of them now luxury hotels. But Hacienda Yaxcopoil (Federal Highway 261, Kilometer 186; 52-999-900-1193; yaxcopoil.com), about 20 miles south of Mérida, has been preserved as though in amber, a noble near-ruin where yellowing photos of the family that has owned it for five generations hang askew on the frescoed walls. For a fee of 50 pesos, you can wander through silent rooms

offering a glimpse into the past, from the figurine of St. Geronimo in the chapel wearing a Yucatán straw hat, to French porcelain bathroom fixtures coated in dust. Mario Alberto Huchín Tun, 65, will give you a tour in Spanish; he is the third generation in his family to work on the hacienda. Take a taxi or hire a car service with a bilingual driver. Try Ralf Hollmann at Lawson's Yucatán at 521-999-947-7599, lawsonsdriiving.blogspot.com.

2 p.m.

6. A YUCATECAN DINER

At Chaya Maya (481 62nd Street at 57th Street, 52-999-928-4780), a woman in traditional Mayan dress makes corn tortillas in the window as families pile in. Try the house specialty, Los Tres Mosqueteros, or The Three Musketeers, which combines three classic Yucatecan dishes: relleno negro (a black sauce made from burnt chiles and spices) over pork; papadzul (an egg dish); and pipián (a sauce with a pumpkin seed base) over turkey, all for 70 pesos.

3 p.m.

7. GOODS TO RELAX IN

El Aguacate (604 58th Street, 52-999-928-6429; hamacaselaguacate.com.mx) sells hammocks for every budget. A finely woven cotton or nylon hammock, which takes about two months to weave, will cost about \$175, but the cheapest one is about \$20. (The store is in Mérida's tiny red-light district, which is safe by day.) Back near the center, shop for a guayabera, a Cuban shirt worn untucked. It was a favorite with early 20th-century Yucatecan grandees, who would go to Cuba to stock up. After the Cuban Revolution, Yucatecans began making their own. A polyester-cotton blend at Guayaberas Jack (507A 59th Street, 52-999-928-6002; guayaberasjack.com.mx) costs about \$30, and an embroidered linen model popular with Mexican presidents sells for about \$170.

7 p.m.

8. FINE FOLK

Every Saturday, the city stages a free show for tourists and locals alike, featuring folk dancing, comedy, mariachi, marimba and romantic trova music (1 Paseo de Montejo at 49th Street, 52-999-928-1800; hotelcasasanangel.com). You can watch from the street or have a drink on the terrace of the Hotel Casa San Angel. For more information on cultural events, check "Yucatán Today," the city's free bilingual monthly tourist guide, yucatanoday.com.

9 p.m.

9. CHOCOLATE DELIGHT

At the restaurant inside Mérida's newest boutique hotel, Rosas & Xocolate (480 Paseo de Montejo at 41st Street, 52-999-924-2992; rosasandxocolate.com), try the catch of the day prepared on a fried tortilla accompanied by prickly pear salad (180 pesos) or duck served with singed corn, local sausage, melon compote and a chile and raisin sauce (220 pesos).

11 p.m.

10. SMILIN' IRISH

An Irish pub seems as though it would be out of place, but Hennessy's Irish Pub (486A Paseo de Montejo, 52-999-923-8993; hennesysirishpub.com) is Mérida's hippest night spot. The photos of the Irish countryside and '80s classics on the soundtrack seem a little off, but the outdoor terrace on the Paseo de Montejo fills up.

Sunday

9 a.m.

11. RIDING DOWN THE AVENUE

Grab coffee at Café la Habana (corner of 59th and 62nd Streets, 52-999-928-0608), then explore the Paseo de Montejo, lined with Beaux Arts-style mansions, most of them built with henequen money. The most stunning is the Palacio Cantón, which houses the Regional Anthropology Museum (485 Paseo de Montejo, 52-999-923-0469; admission: 41 pesos). The street is closed to traffic to make way for cyclists between 8 a.m. and 12:30 p.m. every Sunday. Bikes are available for 15 pesos an hour from municipal offices at the corner of 62nd and 63rd Streets or along the avenue. For a map, go to merida.gob.mx/biciruta/.

Noon

12. TWO-STEP BACK IN TIME

Mérida's old-time dancers go to the temporary stage at Santa Lucía Park, at 60th and 55th Streets, where they dance Mexican danzón and cha-cha-cha to live music under a canopy. The dancers' moves recall a bygone time of smoky dance halls, and they dress the part.

IF YOU GO

Rosas & Xocolate (480 Paseo de Montejo at 41st Street, 52-999-924-2992; rosasandxocolate.com) is a 17-room luxury boutique hotel in two 1930s renovated mansions, decorated with the bright colors of the tropics. Even the spa serves chocolate treatments. Rates from \$215 plus tax, includes full breakfast.

Los Arcos (448B 66th Street, 52-999-928-0214; losarcosmerida.com) is a three-room bed-and-breakfast in a renovated 1890s house crammed with bric-a-brac collected by the owner, David Reed, who serves breakfast in his luscious garden. Rates from \$85.

Hotel Eclipse (491 57th Street, between 58th and 60th Streets, 52-999-923-1600; eclipsehotel.com.mx) has 14 rooms, all designed around a theme (lava, disco, zen). It is relatively cheap at 900 pesos a night (about \$65), or less, with one of the hotel's frequent promotions.

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