

# HIDDEN MEXICO

WITH DR TRAVIS STANTON



**FAR  
HORIZONS**

ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND CULTURAL TRIPS

Updated February 2026





# HIDDEN MEXICO

with Dr. Travis Stanton

## Tour Hidden Mexico from the Gulf Coast Lowlands to Mexico's Central Plateau, and along the way, see seven UNESCO World Heritage Sites

Explore Mexico's lesser-known treasures with Far Horizons on a captivating 15-day journey that unveils the hidden remnants of ancient civilizations and the beauty of its colonial cities.

Guided by a distinguished Mesoamerican expert, our expedition starts from the Gulf Coast lowlands and weaves its way to Mexico's Central Plateau. The adventure includes visits to UNESCO World Heritage sites and cities such as:

- El Tajin, renowned for its Pyramid of the Niches
- The revered Sanctuary of Atotonilco
- El Camino Real Tierra Adentro, the historic 1,590-mile Royal Road connecting Mexico City to New Mexico
- Four nights in the colorful city of Guanajuato
- And the timeless colonial cities: Puebla, Querétaro, San Miguel de Allende, and Mexico City

Beyond these, marvel at Cantona, among the grandest urban discoveries in Mesoamerica, and the vibrant prehistoric murals at Arroyo Seco cave, only recently opened to the public.

Further enriching the trip are visits to recently uncovered archaeological wonders of the Baja region, including El Cerrito, Plazuelas, Peralta, and Barajas.

With limited spots for just 12 participants, join us on this exclusive exploration of Mexico's concealed wonders.



# Daily Itinerary



## Day 1

### Fly to Mexico City and onto Veracruz

Fly to Mexico City. Connect to flight to Veracruz, Mexico's Gulf Coast port. Gather our welcome dinner. Overnight for two nights in the Gran Hotel Diligencias across from the central plaza. (D)

## Day 2

### Cempoala, Xalapa Museum

Cempoala (Zempoala) is located only a few miles north of Veracruz. The capital of the Totonacs, it was the first New World city encountered by Hernán Cortés after he landed near Veracruz on April 22, 1519. The Totonacs were a pre-Columbian group that emigrated to the Gulf Coast of Mexico from the central Mexican highlands. Defeated by the armies of Moctezuma I in the mid-15th century, the community paid heavy taxes under their subjugation. When the Spanish arrived on the Gulf Coast, the chief of the Totonacs decided to join forces to battle the Aztecs. Therefore, Cempoala was a significant staging post in the conquest of Mexico.

Then we drive into the mountains to Xalapa, the capital of the state of Veracruz. Our endpoint is the city's Anthropology Museum, certainly one of the most beautiful in Mexico. The unique structure was designed by the architect Edward Durrell Stone, an early proponent of modern architecture in the United States. Huge, airy rooms pour down the side of a hill, each one home to artifacts of different ancient Mexican civilizations. Spend a leisurely afternoon examining the splendid display of art, with a concentration of artifacts from the Olmec civilization, the mother culture of Mesoamerica. Overnight in the Fiesta Inn Xalapa. (B/L/D)

## Day 3

### Quiahuiztlan

This morning, we return to the Gulf Coast to visit one of the most beautiful locales in Mexico. The remains of Quiahuiztlan are spectacularly positioned on the terraced slopes of a lofty volcanic mountain. This unusual archaeological site has breathtaking views over Villa Rica, where Hernán Cortés first landed, and the azure sea beyond.

Once enclosed by defensive walls, Quiahuiztlan may have been a cemetery for the nobility of Cempoala. While here, we will scrutinize the more than 70 miniature 'houses' spread over several levels that were most likely burial crypts. After our explorations, we will continue to Poza Rica and overnight at the Fiesta Inn for two nights. (B/L/D)



# Daily Itinerary *(cont'd)*

## Day 4

### El Tajin

El Tajin, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, was one of the largest and most important ceremonial centers during the Classic era of Mesoamerica. Here, the impressive stone structures are glorious, many intricately adorned with decorative carved reliefs. There are two distinct areas of the city, with the oldest constructed according to the cardinal compass points and dominated by the Pyramid of the Niches. A masterpiece of ancient architecture, each of the pyramid's four sides is covered with rows of small niches fashioned from blocks of stone. There is a total of 365, suggesting it was used as an astronomical calendar to track the days of the year. El Tajin was a center of trade. The city's multitude of luxury items were traded over a wide area throughout Mesoamerica.

In the afternoon, we will drive to Papantla to see the Voladores. In this ancient ritual, brave men climb a tall pole and launch themselves tied with ropes to twirl upside down to the ground. One man remains on top of the pole, dancing and playing a flute and drum.

Continue to Castillo de Teayo, originally an ancient Huastec city. The primary pyramid towers three levels cut in the middle with a central stairway. During excavations in the late '40s, archaeologists found carved monuments depicting gods and rulers. And there is a small site museum containing some of these artifacts. Several of the sculptures are phallic in shape, very popular in some ancient Mesoamerican cultures. (B/L/D)



## Day 5

### Cantona

We depart the tropical lowlands and drive into Mexico's central highlands. Here, awe-inspiring Cantona, is one of the largest urban centers ever discovered in Mesoamerica, covering almost five square miles. At the height of its occupation, the city was enclosed by a fortified wall. And within have been found at least 24 ballcourts!

Located along an old trading trail between the Gulf Coast and the Central Highlands, Cantona was the source of rich obsidian deposits extracted from the nearby Sierra de las Navajas. After spending time on site, we continue to Puebla. Overnight for two nights at the Palacio San Leonardo, housed in an elegant 19th century former mansion located in the heart of the historic center. Dinner will be in one of Puebla's excellent restaurants serving regional cuisine. (B/L/D)

## Day 6

### Tour Puebla

Founded in 1531, Puebla's stunning historic center is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. It was the first city in central Mexico founded by the Spanish that was not built upon the ruins of a conquered Native settlement.

During our morning walking tour, we will see graceful colonial mansions, the 16th-century Puebla Cathedral on the central square, or Zócalo, and Biblioteca Palafoxiana, a library dating from 1646. The afternoon and dinner are free to explore on our own. (B/L)



## Day 7

### Cacaxtla, Xochitecatl

On our way to Querétaro we stop to see two fascinating sites. Cacaxtla is one of Mexico's most exciting post-war discoveries. In 1974, tomb robbers came upon a series of brilliant paintings decorating the walls of this fortified ceremonial and palace complex. Wonderfully preserved for more than a millennium, these images display unmistakable Maya traits and depict life-size scenes of battle and sacrifice, all still infused with dazzling hues of indigo, ochre, red, and black. The frescos in the lower level chamber appear to be associated with the planet Venus. The room itself is the real 'star chamber,' the place where sacrifices were performed on behalf of Venus.

Nearby Xochitecatl, unlike other contemporary sites, appears to have been a purely ceremonial centre for a population dispersed through the surrounding countryside rather than the centre of an urban area. The major architecture dates to the Middle Preclassic Period (1000–400 BC), but occupation continued, with one major interruption, until the Late Classic, when the site was abandoned.

Continue to Querétaro and overnight for two nights at the Meson de Santa Rosa. (B/L/D)



## Day 8

### Explore El Cerrito and Travel to Santiago de Querétaro

A massive pyramid known as El Cerrito stands almost ten stories high, towering over the outskirts of Querétaro. The city was originally settled by people of the enigmatic Chupicuaro culture around 300 BC. The ceremonial center had a long history as a sacred sanctuary, seemingly honoring a mysterious and curvaceous deity of fertility, the powerful mother goddess. According to Franciscan records, devotees were still worshiping at the temple in the 15th century. Like the Castillo at Chichén Itzá, the pyramid has stairways on all four sides. It is topped by the remains of an early colonial church, much like the great pyramid at Cholula.

After visiting El Cerrito, spend the afternoon touring the historic town of Santiago de Querétaro, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The city is divided into two distinct sections where the indigenous and Spanish lived peacefully during the 17th and 18th centuries. One section is the grid pattern street plan of the Spanish conquerors, and the other is the twisting, winding lanes where the multi-ethnic population lived. Many elaborately decorated civil and religious Baroque monuments from this golden age still stand in the historic center. Dominating the city's skyline is an aqueduct created in the 18th century to channel water from a spring six miles away. Dinner is on our own. (B/L)

## Day 9

### Visit San Miguel de Allende

This morning, we drive to San Miguel de Allende, another UNESCO World Heritage Site. The city was first established in 1542 to protect the Royal Route inland. It played a significant role as a one-time epicenter of the silver trade. The past is revealed in the wealth of ornate baroque Spanish architecture of the 17th century to the 19th century Neo-Gothic. Sitting in front of the Plaza Allende, or Jardín Principal is the Parroquia de San Miguel Archangel. Its grand neo-gothic façade of pink limestone is crowned by soaring towers.

As we wander the streets lined with colonial-era homes and churches, stop to see the Casa de Allende Museum. This was the home of Ignacio Allende, who was a principal figure in the early part of the Mexican War of Independence.

After lunch in one of the charming local restaurants, move on to the UNESCO World Heritage city of Guanajuato, where we can settle a bit as we overnight for four nights. We believe that this city is one of Mexico's best-kept secrets! During our time here, you will have a chance to get out and explore this colorful and pretty city while we use it as a hub for day trips to some lesser-visited but fabulous archaeological sites within driving distance.

Dinner is on our own. (B/L)

## Day 10

### Plazuelas, Peralta

The Bajío region includes parts of the states of Aguascalientes, Jalisco, Guanajuato, and Querétaro. Over the centuries, Native people settled here due to the fertile soil, temperate climate, and the presence of surface water for agriculture. And the remains of these ancient cultures are to be found scattered throughout the countryside. Ignored until recently, archaeological investigations within the past decade have found the Bajío, although still little known, to be an important part of the Mesoamerican universe.

Our morning jaunt takes us to Plazuelas. This large center was constructed on a high artificial platform protected by steep ravines on three sides. The central plaza is encircled by decorated structures. Three of them appear to have been intentionally aligned with three hills that can be seen in the distance. A massive ball court, in the shape of a capital I, has been uncovered. Stone serpent figures are at each corner, along with a marker in the center. Hundreds of petroglyphs are dotted throughout Plazuelas. Near the ball court, a rock engraving displays a diagram of the site. Finds of turquoise, copper bells, seashells, and jadeite indicate an extensive trade network spanning from Guatemala to the Caribbean to New Mexico. Artifacts from the excavations are displayed in the small site museum.

In the afternoon, we explore Peralta, another Bajío site and one of the largest in the region. Surrounded by a multitude of terraced agricultural fields, the huge city once covered more than 300 acres. The primary structure is unique in Mesoamerica, merging a massive stepped pyramid with sunken patios and a circular structure built on top. (B/L/D)



## Day 11

### The Camino Real Tierra Adentro

Scattered over the northern side of Cerro Barajas is one of the largest and best-preserved architectural ensembles in the state of Guanajuato. During the Barajas phase (650-950 AD), hundreds of structures were built of andesite slabs quarried nearby. Curiously, around 950-1000 AD a massive planned abandonment occurred. But before leaving, the inhabitants inexplicably bricked up the doors of the buildings. The Camino Real Tierra Adentro, or Royal Road, was a 1,590-mile-long trade route. Established by the Spanish between Mexico City and San Juan Pueblo in New Mexico, it was used from the middle of the 16th-century to the 20th-century.

In 2010, 55 sites and five existing UNESCO World Heritage Sites along the Mexican section of the route were collectively added to the World Heritage List. They included historic cities, towns, bridges, and haciendas along with the thoroughfare itself. As we traverse Mexico's central plateau, we will search out remnants of this age-old road.

Dinner is on our own. (B/L)

## Day 12

### Arroyo Seco

Spend the day at Arroyo Seco, one of the best rock art sites in the state of Guanajuato. This site was ornamented with many prehistoric polychrome paintings depicting scenes of hunting and dancing along with an assortment of beasts – foxes, coyotes, dogs, eagles, spiders, and more. The age of the pictographs is not definite, but were most likely created by nomadic hunter-gatherers. We will explore two different elevations, “La Zorra” (The Fox) and “La Tortuga” (The Turtle).

Dinner is on our own. (B/L)

## Day 13

### The Santuario de Atotonilco

Another UNESCO World Heritage Site, the Santuario de Atotonilco, was begun in 1740 by Father Luis Felipe Neri de Alfaro. It has been said he experienced a vision of Jesus wearing a crown of thorns and walking with his cross. The padre worked with a local artist, Miguel Antonio Martinez de Pocasangre, who covered the interior walls, depicting scenes from the Bible. Today, Atotonilco is a venerated town with worshippers and penitents from all over Mexico visiting on pilgrimage. Lunch will be in a nearby hacienda where we will not only dine but will be able to taste the succulent tequila produced here.

Then we continue to Mexico City, where we spend two nights in the Hotel Historico Central. Located in the historic center, the inn is housed in a beautifully restored 18th-century colonial building. (B/L)



## Daily Itinerary *(cont'd)*

### Day 14

#### Museo de la Antropología

The Museo de la Antropología in Mexico City is not only the finest museum in the country but also ranks amongst the greatest in the world. We will spend this morning examining the museum's great collections. Special emphasis will be on the often mysterious cultures in central Mexico. After time for lunch on our own at the museum café, move on to the vibrant Abelardo Rodríguez Market. This was the most important Mexican urban renewal project of the 1930s.

Originally designed as a cultural and educational space, it houses not only a market but also a daycare center, theater, pharmacy, dance hall, and library. Unknown to tourists, the interior is a jewel of classic murals painted by acolytes and students of Diego Rivera, including American sisters Marion and Grace Greenwood. Our farewell dinner will be at one of Mexico City's renowned fine restaurants. (B/D)

### Day 15

#### Depart Mexico City

Transfer to the airport for our flights home. (B)

PLEASE NOTE: Occasionally, due to circumstances beyond our control, itinerary changes may occur. We appreciate your understanding and flexibility should this be necessary

### Pre and Post Trip Extensions

Far Horizons offers pre or post extensions for many of our trips. We can also arrange extra nights at the arrival and departure hotel should you wish to arrive early or depart later. Please contact us for details.



# Why Take This Tour?

**Tour seven UNESCO World Heritage Sites: El Tajin, Sanctuary of Atotonilco, El Camino Real Tierra Adentro, and the historic centers of Puebla, Querétaro, San Miguel de Allende, and Mexico City**

**See remote Veracruz archaeological sites: Cempoala, Quiahuiztlan, and Castillo de Teayo**

**Visit Cantona, one of the largest ancient centers discovered in Mesoamerica**

**Explore Baja sites: El Cerrito, Plazuelas, Barajas**

**Enjoy a tequila tasting at a beautiful old hacienda**

**View murals curated by Diego Rivera in Mexico City's Abelardo Rodríguez Market**

**Experience Mexico City's Anthropology Museum**

**Join only 11 other group members**



# Tour Information

## Pricing

For current pricing, please visit [farhorizons.com](http://farhorizons.com) and navigate to our trip page.

## Inclusions

### Price based on double occupancy and includes:

- Internal flights during the trip (if applicable/unless otherwise noted)
- The accompaniment of your scholar throughout the entire trip
- Local English-speaking guide
- Hotel accommodations (3 or 4 stars; or best available based in the area)
- Ground transportation
- Airport transfers for arrivals and departures
- Most meals as noted in the itinerary
- Entry fees to all included sites and museums
- Gratuities to guides, drivers, and restaurant and hotel staff
- Coordination for any private presentations or tours

*Trip prices are based on a minimum number of participants. If this minimum number is not met, trip prices are subject to change. Should the prices need to change, Far Horizons will reach out to registered guests to discuss directly.*

## Single Supplement

Should a roommate be requested and one not be available, the single supplement will be charged.

## Exclusions

- International round trip airfare
- A separate donation check of \$150.00 per person to a designated donation project
- Passport or visa fees
- Required vaccines or tests
- Airport or departure taxes
- Alcoholic drinks, beverages or food not included on set menus
- Excess baggage charges
- Personal tips and hotel incidental expenses
- Laundry or other items of a personal nature

## Donation Checks

As a tour company that benefits from the cultural and natural riches of our destinations, we have a policy of donating to the scientific and cultural sites and projects which we visit. This has created a bond between Far Horizons and the academic and local communities that has helped us establish an extensive list of lecturers and contacts in each of our destinations. We ask that each participant donate to the noteworthy project we designate. The donation amount is \$150.00 per person. Note that the donation is required as part of your registration for the trip and that it is non-refundable.

## Exchange Rate Fluctuations

Prices are based on currency exchange rates keeping below a projected level. While it is unlikely, if the exchange rates should change substantially, Far Horizons reserves the right to charge an additional amount to the trip cost.

## Registration

A deposit of \$1000 per person is required along with your registration & health forms, which will be linked in the email confirmation you receive once you pay your deposit on our booking platform. Final payment is due 120 days before departure. Prior to departure, you will be sent a reading list and a tour bulletin containing travel information.



# Tour Information *(cont'd)*

## Cancellation

Cancellations received in writing at least 120 days before departure will receive a refund less a \$500 per person administrative fee.

Cancellations received less than 120 days before the departure date will not receive a refund. If for any reason you are unable to complete the trip, Far Horizons will not reimburse any fees. Upon registering for the tour, the purchase of travel protection with both trip cancellation and emergency evacuation is strongly advised. Links to recommended insurance policies will be included in the email you receive confirming receipt of your deposit.

## Expectations During Travel

Our trips are designed for flexible, energetic people who like to be active, have a spirit of adventure and a positive attitude. We have designed this trip to be as comfortable as possible, while also aiming to visit some remote or unique sites that other companies do not attempt to include in their itineraries. There may be days where we have very long drives and the conditions of the roads may vary. Hotels and transportation in some remote areas may not be up to western standards. There may be times when no bellhops are available; please pack with the understanding that you need to be able to handle your own luggage at times. Sometimes we may be walking over uneven trails for a mile or more; hiking boots are strongly recommended. Not every meal will be haute cuisine and several lunches may be picnics or box lunches. By maintaining a flexible attitude we will soon be captivated by the beauty of the natural scenery, the hospitality of the local people, and the fascinating sites we will see. Your flexibility and patience will be appreciated.

## Air Ticketing

International round trip flights are not included in the cost of the trip. If Far Horizons must change the trip dates or cancel the trip for any reason, Far Horizons is not responsible for any air ticket you may have purchased. Please send your complete air schedule as soon as you have it. NOTE: Please contact Far Horizons if you would like for us to handle your air ticketing.

## Private Tours and Talks

The private tours of archaeological sites and talks by specialists are scheduled in advance and include a donation to each. Specialists working at these sites are excited about showing their work to interested enthusiasts. However, please be aware that there may be times when the director or a member of the staff may not be on site when our groups arrive due to other commitments.

## Walking and Standing

Far Horizons expects all participants to be physically active and able to walk and climb independently throughout the full touring days. This includes walking over uneven terrain (uphill and downhill) for 2 miles or more at each site. You should expect to be on your feet for much of each day, averaging as much as 5 miles of walking per day. **As such, each participant should be able to walk unaided at a pace of 3 miles per hour for at least an hour at a time, and to stand unsupported for at least 60 minutes.** Bearing this in mind, we suggest that, if you have not already done so, you begin walking several miles every day, ideally including stairs and hills. If you have questions about your ability to keep up with the group or the strenuous nature of this trip, please contact the Far Horizons staff.



## Travel Insurance

We strongly recommend that you consider purchasing travel insurance. Should illness or an unforeseen event force you to cancel your travel plans after your final payment or during your trip, it would be doubly unfortunate to incur a significant financial loss. Trip cancellation protection will enable you to be reimbursed for the loss of your payment if you are unable to travel for any of the covered reasons in the "Outline of Coverage" section, or should you have an accident or suffer from any medical conditions during the trip.

Far Horizons offers customized protection plans through Travel Insured International (a Crum & Forster Company) with the following benefits:

- Trip Cancellation and Trip Interruption for covered reasons
- Trip Delay
- Baggage Loss and Baggage Delay
- Emergency Medical Expenses and Emergency Medical Evacuation
- 24-Hour Accidental Death & Dismemberment
- 24-Hour Travel Assistance & Concierge Services
- Option to upgrade to 'Cancel for Any Reason (CFAR)

We recommend reviewing the language in detail so you are aware of specific parameters; Depending on the policy, to waive the Pre-Existing Medical Condition Exclusion or to upgrade to CFAR coverage, the plan must be purchased within 14 to 21 days of the initial trip deposit, full trip cost must be insured, and traveler is medically fit at time of plan purchase. Otherwise, coverage may be purchased at any time prior to departure.

To obtain a personalized quote and/or purchase a plan through Far Horizons/Travel Insured International, simply click [HERE](#). For specific questions regarding the Worldwide Protector Plan, please contact Travel Insured International's Customer Care Center at 1-800-243-3174 or by email at [customercare@travelinsured.com](mailto:customercare@travelinsured.com), and refer to Far Horizons' account number: 54070.

## Itinerary Changes

Changes in our itinerary, accommodations, and transportation schedules may occur. While we are committed to keeping as close to the published details as possible, sometimes it is simply not possible. Weather events, government affairs, or other factors out of our control sometimes come into play. A good book to read as well as patience, flexible attitude, and a sense of humor are essential.





Meet Your Study Leader...

# Dr. Travis Stanton

Travis Stanton is a Mesoamerican archaeologist and Full Professor at the University of California Riverside. With a Ph.D. from Southern Methodist University (2000) he has worked in Mexico since 1995, primarily directing projects in the states of Yucatan and Quintana Roo; his current field research is heavily focused on Chichen Itza, the great Early Postclassic city of the Maya and UNESCO World Heritage site, for which he has co-created the working 3D model of the site.

For nearly a decade (from 2004-2013), Travis was a professor at the Universidad de las Américas Puebla, located among the ruins of the ancient city of Cholula in Central Mexico, and has spent extensive periods of time in the Gulf Coast Region. These experiences give him a profound grounding across several regions of Mesoamerica, and Central Mexico, where he engages in iconographic, digital archaeology, and oral history projects, is his second home. Among numerous journal articles and book chapters, Travis has published ten books, including a fundamental pedagogical text on the workings of archaeology and a wide-sweeping edited volume covering the Early Postclassic across Mesoamerica.





# Why Travel with Far Horizons?

With over forty years of experience, and an 85% customer return rate, we have stood the test of time. Remind yourself what makes Far Horizons so unique.

## ✦ Scholar Led Tours

Every tour is led by a well-respected PhD scholar with expertise in the subject & regions we visit.

## ✦ Trusted Partnerships

Trusted Partnerships: Every tour is led by a well-respected PhD scholar with expertise in the subject & regions we visit.

## ✦ Behind the Scenes Access

Our groups have private access to closed areas and on-site specialists.

## ✦ Unique Trips

Our itineraries are designed to showcase sites that are off-the-beaten path; we explore places that many travelers never see.

## ✦ Personalized Service

We love knowing our guests and helping with the decision process. We are here to assist you.

## ✦ Small Groups

Our tours have a maximum of 14 travelers. So you can trust that you will have a boutique experience every time.



READY TO TRAVEL WITH US?

# HIDDEN MEXICO

WITH DR TRAVIS STANTON

Email with Questions

[journeys@farhorizons.com](mailto:journeys@farhorizons.com)

Book Now

[click to visit our booking page](#)

See Full Details

[farhorizons.com](http://farhorizons.com)



**FAR HORIZONS**

ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND CULTURAL TRIPS

