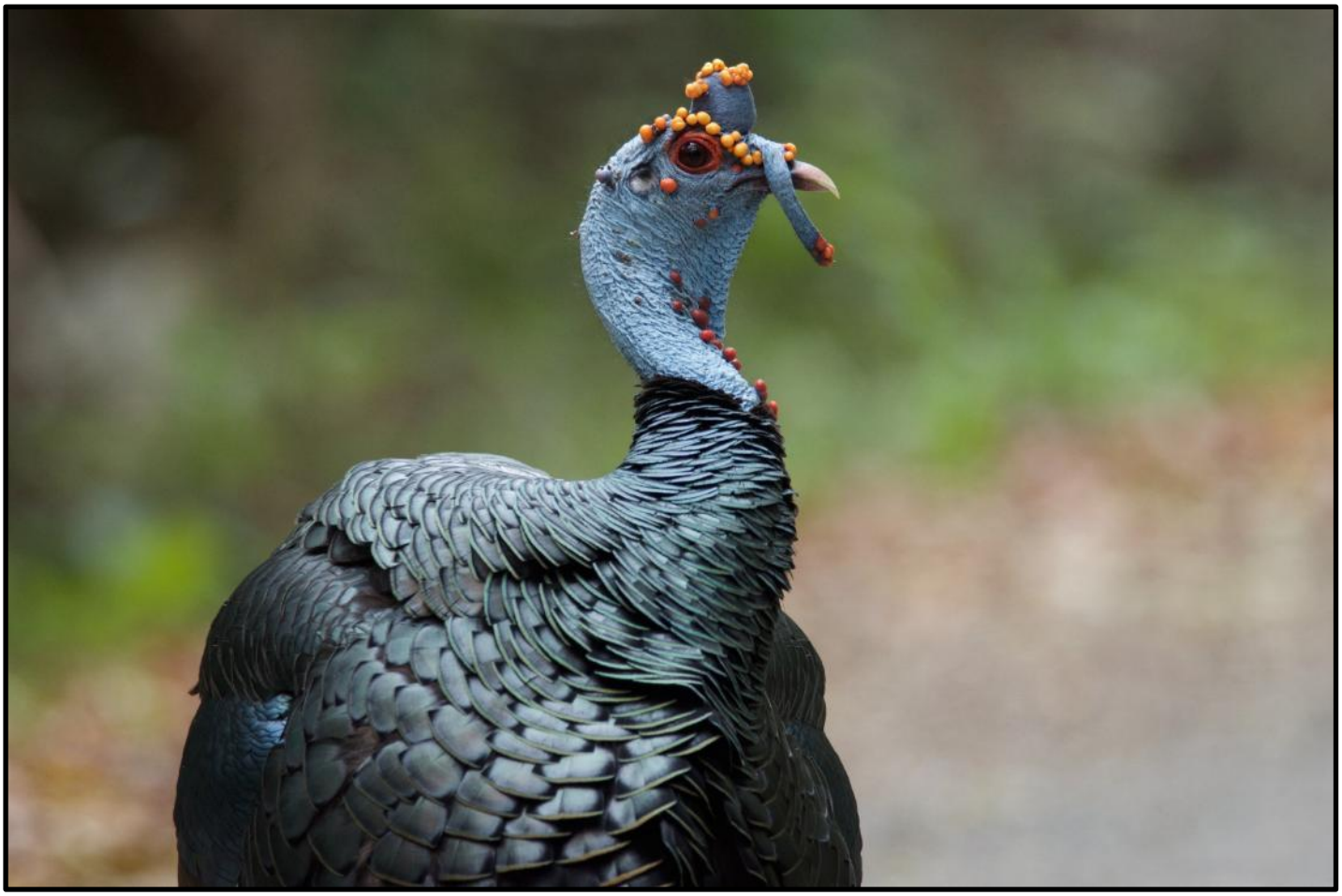
Mexico

Yucatán – Birding & the Ancient Maya



Ocellated Turkey by Clayton Burne

Mexico's Yucatán Peninsula is a vast limestone platform extending between the Gulf of Mexico and the Caribbean Sea. Its flat terrain and geographic isolation have given rise to a remarkable diversity of habitats, from coastal lagoons and mangroves to dry forest and lowland tropical jungle. These ecosystems support a distinctive avifauna, including a wealth of regional endemics and near-endemics that make the peninsula one of Mexico's most rewarding birding destinations.

This engaging journey combines the peninsula's rich birdlife with exploration of its extraordinary Mayan heritage. We visit some of the region's most important archaeological sites, from the iconic ruins of Chichén Itzá to the vast and atmospheric city of Calakmul, deep within the tropical forest. Additional visits to Kohunlich and lesser-known sites near the Guatemalan border provide a more intimate perspective on this ancient civilisation. These remarkable locations, once thriving urban centres, are now set within protected natural landscapes, offering a unique blend of cultural discovery and excellent birding.

Our route takes us through a wide range of key birding areas, including the mangroves of Río Lagartos, the forests around Valladolid and Mérida, and the immense Calakmul Biosphere Reserve. Along the way we will target many of the Yucatán's most sought-after species, including Yucatan Wren, Yucatan Flycatcher, Orange Oriole, Rose-throated Tanager, and the dazzling Mexican Sheartail. The peninsula's dry forests and scrub may

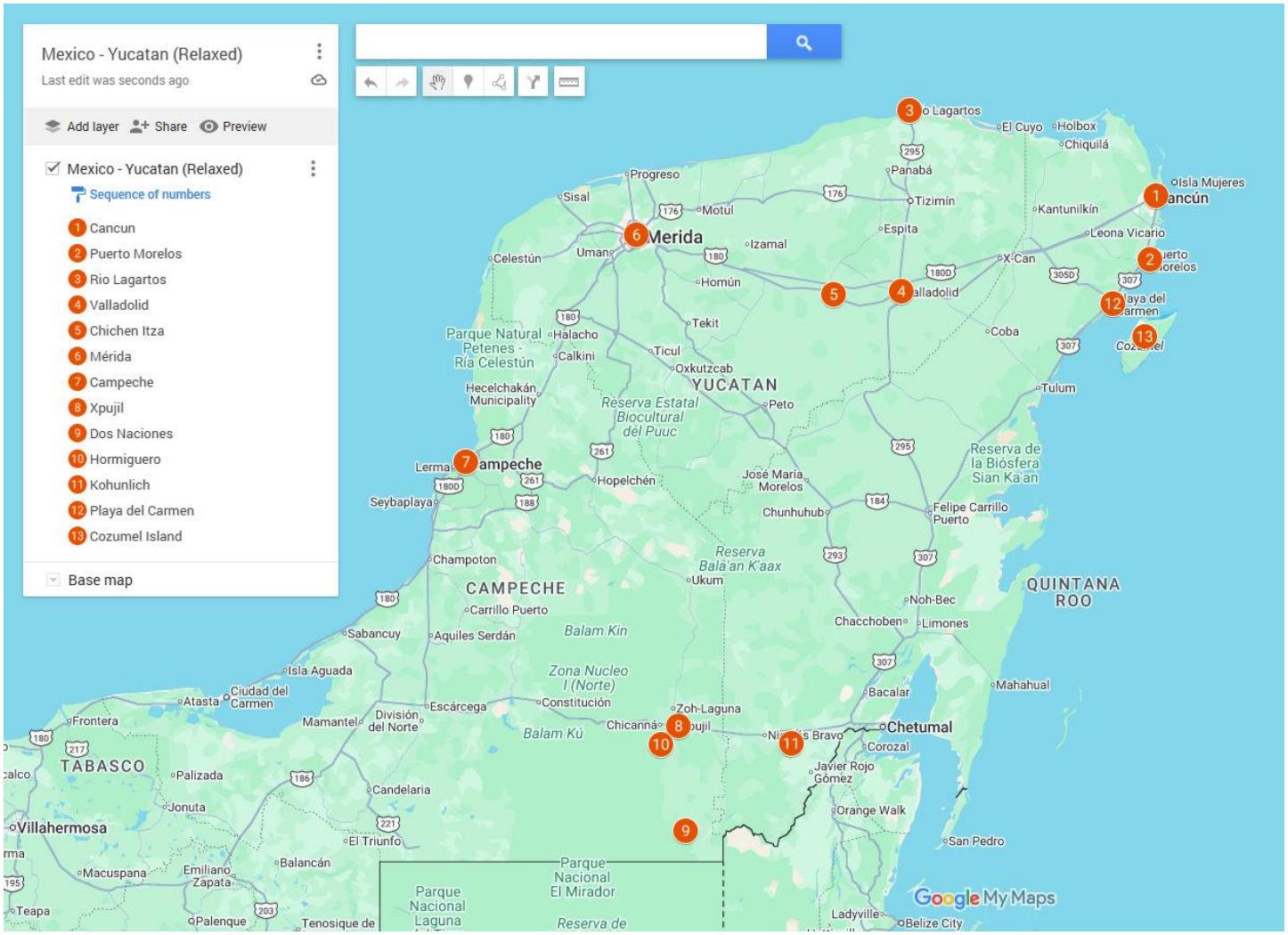
also yield Yucatan Bobwhite and Lesser Roadrunner, while the wetlands of Río Lagartos offer specialties such as American Flamingo and Mangrove Warbler.

In the richer forests of the south, particularly around Calakmul, we stand a good chance of encountering impressive species such as Ocellated Turkey, Keel-billed Toucan, Yucatan Amazon, and the striking Red-capped Manakin. More secretive birds including Tawny-winged Woodcreeper, Mayan Antthrush, and various antbirds and flycatchers add to the sense of exploration, while a visit to Cozumel provides opportunities for island endemics such as Cozumel Emerald and Cozumel Vireo.

Blending rewarding birding, fascinating archaeology, and varied landscapes, this tour offers a well-rounded and immersive exploration of one of Mexico's most captivating regions.

Itinerary & Map

Day 1	**Arrival into Cancun, transfer to Puerto Morelos**
Day 2	**Puerto Morelos Reserve & Río Lagartos boat trip**
Day 3	**Río Lagartos**
Day 4	**Río Lagartos to Valladolid**
Day 5	**Chichen Itza to Mérida**
Day 6	**Mérida to Campeche**
Day 7	**Campeche to Xpujil (Calakmul area) via Mamantel River boat trip**
Day 8	**Calakmul Archaeological Site**
Day 9	**Dos Naciones Archaeological Site**
Day 10	**Hormiguero to Playa del Carmen via Kohunlich Archaeological Site**
Day 11	**Cozumel Island**
Day 12	**Playa del Carmen to Cancun & final departure**


Mexico - Yucatan (Relaxed)
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Mexico - Yucatan (Relaxed)
Sequence of numbers
1 Cancun
2 Puerto Morelos
3 Rio Lagartos
4 Valladolid
5 Chichen Itza
6 Mérida
7 Campeche
8 Xpujil
9 Dos Naciones
10 Hormiguero
11 Kohunlich
12 Playa del Carmen
13 Cozumel Island
Base map
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QUINTANA ROO
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Birding sites in detail



Rose-throated Tanager by Bobby Wilcox

Puerto Morelos Reserve. This excellent reserve protects a mosaic of semi-evergreen forest, mangroves, and coastal habitats, offering a gentle introduction to Yucatán birding. The relatively open woodland provides good viewing conditions, with species such as Yucatan Flycatcher, Green-backed Sparrow, Rose-throated Tanager, and Orange Oriole all possible. Other likely species include Black-headed Trogon, Ivory-billed Woodcreeper, Northern Bentbill, Stub-tailed Spadebill, White-bellied Emerald, Rufous-browed Peppershrike, and Yellow-throated Euphonia. The reserve is particularly productive for woodcreepers, flycatchers, and hummingbirds, while its proximity to the coast adds further diversity.

Río Lagartos. We will explore a variety of habitats in and around Río Lagartos National Park such as mangroves, dry woodland, scrub, and savannah as well as arid, stunted vegetation on the northern edge of the peninsula.

In the windswept scrub, we will search for Yucatan Wren, Orange Oriole, and Mexican Sheartail, while farmland may produce Yucatan Bobwhite, Lesser Roadrunner, Zenaida and Grey-headed Doves, Grey-crowned Yellowthroat and Yucatan Woodpecker.

Our boat excursion should yield Bare-throated Tiger Heron, Rufous-necked Wood Rail, Mangrove Warbler, American Flamingo, Reddish Egret, Boat-billed and Tricolored Herons, Roseate Spoonbill, American White Ibis, Crane and Common Black Hawks, and American Pygmy Kingfisher. Other possibilities include Clapper Rail, Mangrove Vireo, Black Catbird, Caribbean Elaenia and Yellow-faced Grassquit.



Mexican Sheartail by Bobby Wilcox

Valladolid. Time permitting, we head out this evening to search for Yucatan Poorwill.

Chichen Itza. One of the most important cities of the ancient Maya civilisation,



Chichen Itza by Mario la Pergola

Chichén Itzá flourished between approximately 600–1200 CE and later came under strong Toltec influence. The iconic pyramid of El Castillo dominates the site, aligned with astronomical events, while the Great Ball Court and Temple of the Warriors reflect the city's political and ceremonial importance.

Birding the ruins and surrounding woodland may produce Turquoise-browed Motmot, Yucatan Jay, Golden-fronted Woodpecker, Lineated Woodpecker, Couch's Kingbird, Social Flycatcher, White-fronted Parrot and Melodious Blackbird.

Mérida. Our main target here is the Yucatan Gnatcatcher, a regional endemic of dry scrub. Other species we may find include White-eyed Vireo, Couch's Kingbird, Tropical Mockingbird, Vermilion Flycatcher and Hooded Oriole.

Miguel Colorado cenotes. Located within a tract of semi-evergreen forest interspersed with wetlands, the Miguel Colorado cenotes offer a scenic and productive birding stop. The area is characterised by limestone sinkholes surrounded by mature forest, with a network of trails and boardwalks providing access to a variety of habitats.

Birding around the cenotes and adjacent woodland may produce species such as Keel-billed Toucan, Collared Aracari, Black-headed Trogon, and Lineated Woodpecker, while



Yucatan Wren by Clayton Burne



Yucatan Jay by Clayton Burne

quieter forest sections can hold Stub-tailed Spadebill, Northern Bentbill, and Greenish Elaenia. The dense understorey and shaded edges are particularly good for antbirds and other skulking species, with Dusky Antbird and Black-faced Antthrush possible.

Wetland edges and open areas may produce Northern Jacana, Green Heron, and Least Grebe, while overhead activity can include raptors such as Roadside Hawk and Bat Falcon. The site also supports a good diversity of flycatchers, woodcreepers, and tanagers, making it a well-rounded stop both scenically and ornithologically.

Campeche. As we travel south, we pass through a transition of dry forest, wetlands and forest edge. Stops along the way may produce species such as White-fronted Parrot, Olive-throated Parakeet, Roadside Hawk, Laughing Falcon, Groove-billed Ani, Scrub Euphonia, Yellow-winged Tanager and Masked Tityra. Cenotes and forested reserves add scenic value, while also supporting species like Northern Jacana, Least Grebe, Purple Gallinule and Green Heron.

Mamantel River. A peaceful boat excursion along the Mamantel River offers excellent opportunities for aquatic and forest-edge species. The main target is Sungrebe, while other species include Ringed, American Pygmy and Green Kingfishers, Least Grebe, Boat-billed Heron and Anhinga. Raptors such as Crane Hawk may also be encountered, while surrounding vegetation may hold Yellow-olive Flycatcher, Bright-rumped Attila and Tropical Gnatcatcher.

Calakmul Bat Cave. We'll make an evening visit to the local bat cave (Volcán de los Murciélagos), where one of the most remarkable mammal spectacles unfolds. As dusk settles, millions of bats, predominantly Mexican Free-tailed Bats, begin streaming out in dense, smoke-like columns, creating an almost surreal scene. We are likely to see several raptors such as Bat Falcon and occasionally Aplomado and Peregrine Falcons, taking advantage of the emergence and hunting bats in the fading light.



Yucatan Flycatcher by Bobby Wilcox

Calakmul Archaeological Site. Calakmul was one of the most powerful Maya cities, rivalling Tikal during the Classic Period (c. 250–900



Black-headed Trogon by Bobby Wilcox

CE). Hidden deep within vast tropical forest, its massive pyramids rise above the canopy, offering sweeping views across the dense forest. The site remains relatively remote, enhancing its atmosphere of exploration.

Birding here can be exceptional, with the sought after Ocellated Turkey being seen frequently, along with other targets such as Yucatan Amazon, Keel-billed Toucan, Pale-billed Woodpecker, Red-capped Manakin, Mayan Antthrush, Tawny-winged Woodcreeper, Ornate Hawk-Eagle and Blue Bunting. Additional species may include Collared Aracari, White-necked Puffbird, Yellow-billed Cacique, Slate-headed Tody-Flycatcher, Grey-headed Tanager and Long-billed Gnatwren.

Dos Naciones Archaeological Site. Located near the Guatemalan border, this little-visited Maya site offers a more remote and atmospheric experience. The ruins are modest and partially reclaimed by the surrounding forest, giving the area a strong sense of exploration. Surrounded by relatively intact habitat, it supports species with more southern affinities, including White-collared Manakin, Rufous-tailed Jacamar, Stripe-throated Hermit, and Dusky Antbird. Other possibilities include Black-faced Antthrush, Ruddy Woodcreeper, Sulphur-rumped and Ochre-bellied Flycatchers, and King Vulture. The quiet setting enhances both birding and the feeling of being far off the usual tourist trail.



Cozumel Emerald by Bobby Wilcox

Hormiguero. Hormiguero is a smaller but architecturally distinctive Maya site, known for its elaborate façade masks and decorative stonework. The surrounding forest and nearby lagoons provide productive birding. Species may include Keel-billed Toucan, Russet-naped Wood Rail, Northern Jacana, Northern-barred Woodcreeper, Stub-tailed Spadebill, Plain Xenops and Yellow-bellied

Tyrannulet, along with various tanagers and flycatchers.



Cozumel Vireo by Bobby Wilcox

Kohunlich Archaeological Site. Kohunlich is best known for the Temple of the Masks, featuring large stucco representations of the sun god dating back over 1,200 years. The site flourished during the Early Classic Period and retains an impressive sense of scale despite partial restoration.

Birding the grounds may produce Chestnut-colored Woodpecker, White-necked Puffbird, Red-capped Manakin, Grey-headed Dove, Black-headed Trogon, Collared Aracari and Yellow-throated Toucan, along with various flycatchers and woodcreepers.

Cozumel Island. Though only a short ferry ride from the mainland, this small island hosts several endemic species, making it a highly rewarding part of the tour. Sadly, Cozumel Thrasher has not been reliably reported since 2004 and is now widely considered likely extinct, after Hurricane Gilbert devastated the island in 1988. Fortunately, other endemics remain, including Cozumel Emerald, Cozumel Vireo and Cozumel Wren (recently split from the widespread House Wren).

We will also be searching for species characteristic of Caribbean Island environments, including Black Catbird, Caribbean Elaenia, Mangrove Vireo, Mangrove Cuckoo, White-crowned Pigeon and Caribbean Dove. Additional species may include Yucatan Vireo, Grey Kingbird, Tropical Mockingbird, Yellow-faced Grassquit and Bananaquit, while mangrove areas can produce herons, egrets and other wetland birds.

The island also supports several distinctive subspecies, including forms of Western Spindalis, Blue-grey Gnatcatcher, Rufous-browed Peppershrike, Roadside Hawk and Mangrove Warbler.



Cozumel Wren by Bobby Wilcox

Tour Grading & Key

Overall Ease		Moderate. Suitable for most guests with a general interest in birding & wildlife with a reasonable level of mobility. Early morning starts are regular. Some longer days & travel periods are to be expected.
Birding Ease		Moderate. Many species offer good viewing in open or semi-open habitats, particularly in the north. However, several key targets in forested areas can be more elusive & require patience.
Accommodation		Comfortable overall. Ranges from good hotels to smaller, more characterful lodges, with simpler standards in more remote areas.
Walking / Trails		Mostly easy walking on flat terrain, including roads, tracks & sandy trails. Some forest birding may involve uneven ground. Optional climbing of archaeological ruins can be steep & physically demanding.
Vehicles / Roads		Generally good road conditions throughout, though the itinerary includes several long drives between key regions.
Photography		Good general opportunities, particularly in open habitats & wetlands. No dedicated hides. *[Note that high-end camera equipment is often restricted at major archaeological sites without special permits.]
Annoyances		Mosquitoes, biting insects, heat & humidity can be factors, particularly in forested & coastal areas.

Financial Arrangements and Important Notes

Tour dates, prices, single supplement, approximate flight costs and tour spaces are displayed on our website.

Tour inclusions:

- All meals from dinner on day 1 to breakfast on day 12;
- All lodgings;
- Bottled water;
- All ground transportation during the tour;
- Return Ferry;
- All reserve entrance fees;
- All guiding services
- Tips for local guides, drivers and services.

Tour exclusions:

- Visa fees;
- ANY flights;
- Any beverages (including mini-bar charges at hotels);
- Optional excursions;
- Special gratuities;
- Telephone calls, laundry and other items of a personal nature.

Single Supplement: The single supplement cost for this tour will be charged if you wish to have single accommodation. If RBL cannot provide you with a rooming partner for these nights although you choose to share, the single supplement will become applicable. We will make all reasonable efforts to ensure that a rooming partner is found if you do wish to share.

Tipping: As noted above, gratuities (drivers, hotel staff, restaurants etc.) are included on this tour. However, this does NOT include your Rockjumper leader/s. If you feel that they have given you excellent service, it is entirely appropriate to tip them at your discretion.

- **Due to constantly fluctuating exchange rates, we quote our tours in 4 currencies. The tour price is fixed only in the currency printed in bold, and the actual cost in the other currencies listed will be adjusted according to prevailing exchange rates at the time of final invoicing. The same applies to approximate flight and single supplement rates.**
- **Rates are based upon group tariffs; if the tour does not have sufficient registrations, a small group supplement will be offered to confirm the tour.**
- **Tour prices are subject to unforeseen increases in tour related costs and may have to be adjusted as a result.**
- **The designated tour leader/s may be changed at short due to unforeseen circumstances.**
- **The itinerary is indicative only. Changes may need to be made to the order in which the tour is conducted, or some of the venues we visit closer to departure. We will attempt to adhere as close to the original program as possible.**

- This tour offers a well-rounded experience, balancing birding and wildlife viewing with an appreciation of the region's archaeological sites. The tour leader will have strong birding expertise, while knowledgeable local guides will provide deeper insight at the archaeological sites.
- Many of the historic sites that we will visit on this tour are popular tourist attractions and we will share the area with many other people; patience will be required at times.
- It can be hot with harsh sun in some areas of Mexico, especially along the coast, so please come prepared with hats & sun cream for protection. Humidity levels are also high along the coast.
- Mosquitoes & tiny bloodsucking flies can be numerous at times & it's advisable to pack a good supply of effective insect repellent.
- The ferry ride to and from Cozumel is aboard a large scheduled ferry. Hand luggage is restricted to a small carry-on purse, tote bag or small backpack. All large backpacks, suitcases & other bags need to be checked onto the vessel & will only be accessible again when reaching shore. The ferry ride is short & thus should pose no impediment in this respect. Your tour leader will help arrange the checking of luggage.

Arrival and Departure Details

The tour departs from Cancun on day 1 with a road transfer to Puerto Morelos. The tour will conclude here after a mid-morning transfer from Playa del Carmen.

The above information in respect of arrivals and departures is a guide only. Precise arrival and departure information will be sent to you in your Tour Confirmation package once the tour has been officially confirmed. If you wish to arrive early and/or depart late and would like assistance in this regard, kindly contact the Rockjumper office.

Cancun International Airport, Cancun (IATA: CUN) is the main port of entry for this tour and is well serviced by many international carriers.

Visa requirements differ by country, nationality of the traveller and duration and purpose of your intended stay. It may be necessary to obtain a visa or an electronic travel authorization in advance of your travel. It is therefore vitally important that you check with your travel agent/consulate/embassy for exact visa requirements.

DO NOT book any flights until the Rockjumper Team have officially confirmed the tour.