

A CAPITAL RISING Mexico City

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Some 700 years ago, a wandering tribe of Aztecs arrived at a steep mountain valley and discovered an island in the middle of a crystalline lake that stretched out before their eyes. They drained the swampy waters, creating floating gardens and canals, and gave their new home the name Tenochtitlán.

Then the Spanish arrived in 1519 and the rest is pretty much history; little is left to remind us of this glorious Mexican Venice. But Mexico City has somehow retained the passion, ingenuity, intensity and warmth of its ancestors.

This is a city of countless cities. Nearly 22million people flow across the patchwork streets – some live in ramshackle slums with little access to water and nutrition; others in cosmopolitan colonias (neighbourhoods) made up of majestic stone mansions and hip cafés as well as verdant park squares.

Each area offers its visitors something special: in the chaotic centre, sweeping colonial palaces have been built atop indigenous temples, and silversmiths bustle for space alongside butchers and wedding-dress makers. Look closely and you will find some of the buildings are tilted – it turns out the dried-out bed of a lake isn't the best foundation for construction, and Mexico City is now sinking.

Down south lies the capital's intellectual heart. Names like Mathias Goeritz, Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera are on everybody's lips, and highways give way to lazy cobbled streets, bohemian cafés and sluggish canals. The oasis here reminds you

that the metropolis has one foot in the future and another rooted firmly in the past.

Mexico City, or DF (Distrito Federal) as the locals call it, is unexpectedly lush. Jacaranda trees line the avenues, and their flowers bathe the streets in a carpet of bright purple blooms throughout the spring. There are also palm trees with trunks so robust that you'll wonder if they outlived the Aztecs themselves.

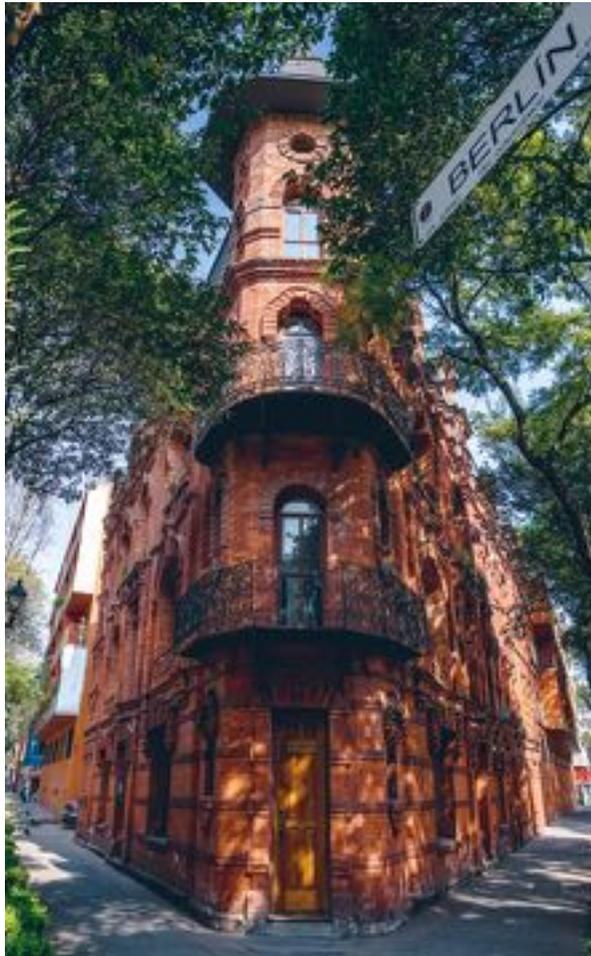
Young entrepreneurs are taking the reins in the design and art scene, and the city pulsates with exhibitions, film screenings, innovative architecture and fashionable new labels. There are more museums here than in any other city in the world, and Mexico City is home to the largest university in Latin America. The sheer number of protests that take place along the main boulevard Reforma could give the French a run for their money.

Gastronomical choices abound – on any given day you can choose between market stalls which source the freshest produce from all over the country, taco joints, gourmet bistros, traditional cantinas, artisanal mezcal bars and inventive takes on the local cuisine.

The Mexican people display an unrivalled hospitality. They will throw open their doors and treat you with such courtesy that you'll end up wondering how you'll ever go home. Nothing means "no" here, which doesn't exactly mean yes either – but it's certainly a start. ▶▶

Juárez, San Rafael and Santa María La Ribera

These three colonias began life as wealthy enclaves in the late 1800s, and were later populated by creatives and writers, becoming home to the city's most iconic theatres and cinemas. The areas suffered from a period of neglect after the 1985 earthquake, but today their magnificent buildings are being repossessed as people are priced out of 'trendier' areas further south. Stroll between stately mansions, small local businesses, markets, all sorts of repair shops and traces of a re-emerging art scene.



AVENIDA BUCARELI AND CALLE BERLIN

A number of eclectic architectural styles can be found in the area around Havre Street and the Giordano Bruno Plaza. And Calle Berlin is famous for its French design elements – including mascarons, crests and floral motifs – many of which are based on the baroque era of Louis XIII.

HOTEL CARLOTA

The features of this newly opened boutique hotel offer guests a delicate balancing act between original workmanship and innovative design. A streamlined swimming pool doubles up as a watering hole for creative types.

Rooms from £150



ROSETTA BAKERY

The Juárez branch of this renowned bakery is set inside an old townhouse. Their bread and pastries are made fresh every day, and the coffee here is second to none.

KIOSKO MORISCO

A surreal gem showcasing the best of Moorish architecture. Wander around and watch the colours and patterns mix and morph before your eyes.



YOU MAY ALSO LIKE

HAVRE 77

This restored mansion is home to some of the city's best new eateries, including a French bistro, a chic oyster bar and KYO sushi, where there is limited seating, so it's best to arrive early.

MUSEO EL ECO

Founded by renowned architect Mathias Goeritz in the 1950s, El Eco still upholds his vision of an interdisciplinary meeting space for the arts. The gallery mixes visual arts with dance, music, poetry and theatre.

MUSEO DEL CHOPO

This pavilion was designed by Bruno Möhring for a 1902 exhibition in Germany, then the structure was shipped over to Mexico. The firm TEN Arquitectos recently renovated the pavilion, adding exhibition spaces, screening rooms and a café.

LIBRERÍA JORGE CUESTA

One of those bookshops where you could get lost for hours. Its two floors are filled with dusty tomes, treasures and unexpected vintage finds.

PARKER & LENOX

A speakeasy jazz bar with a diner out front. Tuck into their heavily addictive truffle fries and famous cheeseburgers as you relax into a night of live music and drinks.

MARSO GALLERY

A contemporary art gallery promoting Mexican and international artists, Marso collaborates with cultural institutions and runs residency programmes, as well as publishing books. ▶▶

Condesa and Roma

These two colonias are at the heart of the city's culinary, creative and nightlife scene. Condesa's leafy streets and colourful, quirky buildings house a wide range of cafés, studios, boutiques and vintage spots, a far cry from the area's past as a horseracing track belonging to Condesa (Countess) Miravalle.

La Roma's majestic stone mansions were fashioned after popular turn-of-the-century styles and are now an eclectic mix of art nouveau, gothic, art deco, Moorish and European architecture. Here design agencies, restaurants, cocktail bars, art galleries and picturesque plazas are populated by the city's young and international crowd. You'll be hard pressed to run out of things to see and do here.



M.N. ROY

This infamous after-hours club often hosts visiting DJs and famous artists. Somehow everyone seems to end up here.

LARDO

On a sunny street corner, Lardo serves up delicious healthy breakfasts, juices, pastries and gourmet coffee. For lunch and dinner, hearty Italian tapas are on the menu and their extensive wine list means you'll be lingering at the bar for hours.



LA VALISE

Housed in a 20th century French-style mansion, this three-room boutique hotel also has its own concept store. Ask to stay in the top-floor suite La Terraza, roll your bed along the runners to the patio and sleep under the stars.

Rooms from £220



YOU MAY ALSO LIKE

OJO DE AGUA

The best place to pick up a rejuvenating juice before setting out for the day.

MAISON ARTEMISIA

Cosy French restaurant and cocktail parlour Artemisia hosts live music (think jazz, folk and blues) every Tuesday night.

CÓRDOBA 25

Created by branding agency Savvy Studio, this building is home to the Casa Bosques bookshop, which boasts the city's largest selection of international newspapers and magazines, along with several fashion and accessory stores as well as an art gallery.

EL PARNITA

If you want to catch a glimpse of Mexico City's hipster subculture, while picking from a vast array of gourmet tacos, then this is your place.

BROKA BISTROT

Set inside a courtyard which you enter through the kitchen's back door, Broka is a fun place to get dinner with friends – be sure to try a carajillo (an espresso mixed with orange liqueur) with dessert.

CONTRAMAR

The best seafood in the city. Don't miss their tuna tostadas and fish a la talla. Open for lunch only.

BELMONDO

Take a break and grab lunch in Belmondo, a staple in La Roma for salads, soups and delicious sandwiches.

BALTRA

The only cocktail bar that's really worth going to in La Condesa. Their 'apium or opium' cocktail steals the show – a mix of mezcal, citrus and celery bitters.

Centro

Bustling, chaotic, loud, vibrant and beautiful (if a little crazy) – the historic centre of DF is an adventure in and of itself. Packed with over 1,500 buildings classified as historic or artistic monuments, a wealth of museums, cantinas, churches built on top of ancient Aztec temples, shops selling pretty much everything under the sun (including a street dedicated to black magic) El Centro, as the locals call it, will have all your senses tingling. Festivals and protests often flood the Zócalo (central square) so make sure to check before you go. A visit to this part of the city is essential to help any traveller leave with a deeper understanding of Mexican culture and history.



BELLAS ARTES

This stunning white marble palace is the city's main concert and arts hall. On the top floor you'll find sweeping murals by Rufino Tamayo and Diego Rivera, but if those aren't enough head to the Secretaría de la Educación Pública and the Colegio San Ildefonso.

CHAYA B&B

Next to the emblematic Alameda Park, this B&B sits on top of a building which houses some of the city's coolest new brands and restaurants. A hotel 'for travellers by travellers', Chaya's spacious rooms and simple décor feel like a home away from home.

Rooms from £130



DOWNTOWN MEXICO



SECRETARÍA DE LA EDUCACIÓN PÚBLICA

YOU MAY ALSO LIKE

DOWNTOWN MEXICO

The latest offering from the boutique hotel group Habita, this hotel has a lovely rooftop terrace – perfect for hot summer days – as well as a range of design stores inside a courtyard.

Rooms from £260

EDIFICIO CORREOS

What every post office wishes it could be. Golden balustrades and cream sandstone adorn this gem of Renaissance revival architecture. The style is typical of the Porfirian period, when Mexican artists mirrored the current of European fashion.

EL CARDENAL

A classic restaurant offering traditional Mexican food. Breakfasts here are especially tasty – try the chilaquiles and huevos rancheros.

EL 123

This Thai restaurant is located inside an old newspaper bodega and doubles up as an art gallery and performance space for musicians.

ZINCO

The city's best jazz bar is hidden away inside an ancient bank vault, and its crowd is filled with bohemians, students, intellectuals, businessmen – anyone who enjoys a good tune.

EL MERCADO DE SAN JUAN

This food market is where all the city's gourmet and rare food can be found. Top chefs and restaurateurs arrive at the break of dawn to gather ingredients, and wandering the aisles of spices and ingredients offers visitors a journey through the best of Mexican cuisine.

LIMOSNEROS

Experience a contemporary twist on Mexican gastronomy at this restaurant, which showcases locally sourced ingredients and has an extensive mezzal list.

BÓSFORO

A candlelit clandestine bar which has slowly made a name for itself thanks to its menu of rare mezcals and off-the-beaten-track atmosphere.

San Ángel and Coyoacán

To understand what the city was like before the metropolis took over, head south to Coyoacán and San Ángel. You'll feel as though you've stepped back in time – narrow colonial streets, cobble pavements, colourful stone houses, birdsong, musicians and bohemian cafés give this area a peaceful and welcoming atmosphere. Back in the day, this was where the intellectual crowd gathered (think Trotsky, Frida Kahlo, Diego Rivera and Mathias Goeritz.) Come on a weekend for the San Ángel arts and crafts market, then stroll through Coyoacán, and if you are feeling adventurous, take a trajinera boat along the canals and floating gardens of Xochimilco.



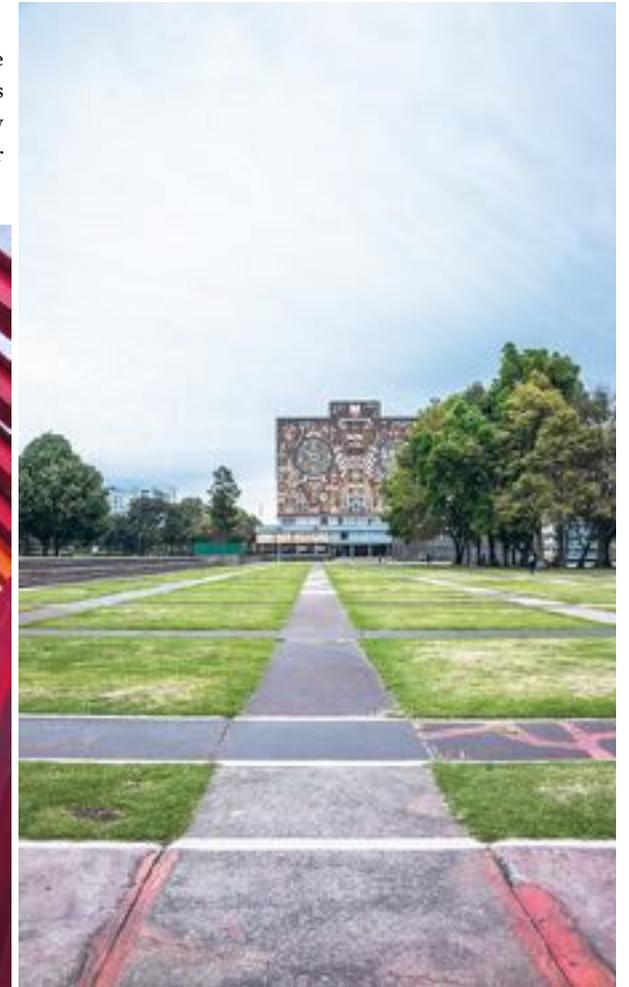
CASA ESTUDIO DIEGO RIVERA Y FRIDA KAHLO

Designed by architect Juan O'Gorman, and linked by a small terrace, these two studios are where Frida and Diego spent their days. Architecture enthusiasts will appreciate the pure functionality of O'Gorman's neat design.



LA UNAM

This is Latin America's largest university and houses some incredible architecture (it's a Unesco World Heritage Site) as well as the MUAC museum and a sculpture garden created by some of the country's greatest artists. Check out their website for details on the latest concerts and events.



YOU MAY ALSO LIKE

MUSEO ANAHUACALLI

Atop a hill overlooking the city, this museum resembles an Aztec temple – and with good reason. Diego Rivera made it out of dark volcanic stone and designed it to house his collection of pre-Hispanic art.

CENTRO CULTURAL ELENA GARRO

You might be taken aback by the design of this bookstore, which is laid across two floors of a traditional stone mansion and encased in a sleek glass exterior.

LOS DANZANTES

On the main square in Coyoacán, Los Danzantes serves up delicious food from Oaxaca. After dinner, head to any of the live music bars close by.

SAN ÁNGEL INN

This 17th-century hacienda has at various times been both a monastery and a factory for pulque, a spirit made from fermented agave sap. Its gardens, patios and ballrooms still retain a colonial feel, and it's the perfect place to stop by for a tamarind margarita.

LA CINETECA NACIONAL

The national film institute preserves, cements and drives Mexican cinematic talent and has a vast archive of past works from around the world. It's fun to come here at night and pick one of its many screenings.

THE HAPPENING

A boutique concept store in San Ángel which represents local Mexican design brands.

Polanco

A chic and affluent neighbourhood, Polanco's main street Presidente Masaryk Avenue is dotted with global luxury stores and designers, and many of the best restaurants have set up shop here along with international names like Entrecote, Nobu and Cipriani. It's right next to El Bosque de Chapultepec, Mexico City's central park, which covers more than 1,600 hectares. You can spend an entire day roaming the park's attractions, between museums like the El Rufino Tamayo, El Museo de Arte Moderno, La Casa del Lago, El Castillo de Chapultepec and even a zoo.

MUSEO NACIONAL DE ANTROPOLOGÍA

This enormous structure houses some of Mexico's rarest artefacts, weaving a path through the vast tapestry of cultures which make up this country's past and present.



JUMEX

A contemporary art museum designed by David Chipperfield, Jumex exhibits part of one of the largest private collections of contemporary art in Latin America. It also hosts rotating exhibits and cultural events.



AVENIDA MASARYK

Work was recently completed pedestrianising much of this retail mecca, and Masaryk's wide pavements are great for luxury window shopping as you stroll.

YOU MAY ALSO LIKE

ADONIS

If you need to take a break from Mexican food, Adonis serves up the best Arabic food in town, with especially delicious Lebanese dishes. The décor is a little kitsch, but we like it that way.

LAS ALCOBAS

Your best bet for an intimate boutique hotel, Las Alcobas is placed right next to 'Polanquito', the heart of Polanco. Its design is sleek and contemporary and it has two delicious in-house restaurants. Rooms from £260

ENO

A small gourmet café offering breakfasts and lunches in Polanco with high-quality ingredients. Try their ensalada de nopales (cactus) or couscous for lunch.

LA CASA DEL LAGO

Deep in the woods of Chapultepec, La Casa del Lago is a charming lakeside culture centre. They have regular visual arts and dance events, as well as film screenings, music concerts and poetry readings.

ONORA

We love this store for its high-quality Mexican artesanías (crafts). Founder Maggie Dalton has close ties with indigenous communities producing woollen throws, embroidery, beadwork, pottery and wooden objects.

DULCE PATRIA

The most original, delicious and creative contemporary Mexican menu you'll come across created by head chef Martha Ortiz. >>>

TIPS + TRICKS

Markets, markets, markets. As the Chilean poet Pablo Neruda put it: “Mexico is in its markets.” You would miss a large part of the magic of Mexico if you didn’t spend some time bartering with vendors and scouring the aisles of chiles, pasillas, moles, gusanos de maguey, camotes and mounds of colourful fruit. Mexicans are intrinsically linked to the food they cook and eat – some families even claim to have been selling their produce since the time of Tenochtitlán. Go to El Mercado de San Juan for gourmet produce, El Mercado de Sonora for all sorts of crazy objects, costumes, instruments, even dark magic and medicinal herbs. The Jamaica Market has all the flowers under the Mexican sun, and in La Lagunilla you can hunt for incredible vintage furniture.

Traffic in Mexico City is notoriously bad. But in recent years, getting around the city has become much more manageable. Uber works like a charm here, especially when combined with the traffic-avoiding app Waze. The city also recently installed a network of urban bikes called EcoBici, which offers visitors a convenient and scenic way to move around the colonias.

Mexico City is still shaking off a reputation for danger and crime. Today the city feels safe, but it’s still best to use designated taxis ranks rather than hailing cabs from the street, especially at night.

Rainy season runs from the middle of June to September – this means gorgeous sunny mornings which turn into cloudy

afternoons until religiously, at 5PM, rain descends from above. It’s best to try and schedule your trip just before or after this time, although there is something very bewitching about the powerful thunderstorms.

The city can get a little hectic sometimes, and if you’re seeking to escape there’s a whole host of charming towns and destinations only a few hours’ drive away. Try San Miguel de Allende, Tepoztlán, Malinalco and if you like camping, Mineral del Chico national park.

Mexican slang is coloured and varied. Here’s a list of phrases to start you on your way:

- ¿qué onda?** = what’s up?
- ¡qué padre!/¡qué chingón!** = how cool
- ¿neta?** = really?
- güey** = dude
- ¡órale!** = alright! let’s go!
- pinche** = damned e.g. **mi pinche coche** = my damned car
- naco** = tacky, cheap
- una fresa** = a preppy, upper-class Mexican
- ¡no mames!** = no way!
- peda** = drunk, crazy, insane or a party

