



## Travel: Plan a family getaway to Campeche

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Imagine walking along a wide, well-groomed path through a tropical jungle, listening to the chirps of indigenous birds darting in and out of the trees. The bright morning sun filters through the canopy of leaves overhead, and a gentle breeze guides you along the path.

You turn a corner and the jungle opens into an expanse of grass the size of a football field. On the opposite end stands a majestic stone pyramid ten stories high. The ancient Mayan temple is surrounded by smaller pyramids and mounds, including a well-preserved ball court once used for ceremonial competitions.

They are evidence of the thriving culture that existed here more than 2000 years before Christopher Columbus ever stumbled upon the Americas.

From the Grand Canyon to Disneyland, the U.S. offers an endless variety of family-friendly destinations for spring break or summer getaways. But for a truly unforgettable vacation, San Francisco de Campeche, Mexico can't be beat.

Located on the Yucatan Peninsula, the Colonial city of Campeche, pronounced kahm-PEH-cha, was once a main port for commerce between Europe and Mexico and still reflects Spanish and Caribbean influences in its architecture and cuisine. In response to numerous pirate attacks, authorities in the late 1600s fortified the city with a large wall and eight massive bulwarks equipped with cannons for defensive fire. Remnants of the structures remain, including the Puerta del Mar—the stately “Sea Gate” that faces the gulf—and the Fort of San Miguel.

Just inside the Sea Gate is the old city center, its storefronts occupied by boutiques and restaurants, along with the usual smattering of pharmacies, coffee bars and convenience stores that one would expect in any modern city.

Thanks to a government-sponsored program in the 1990s, more than 1,600 historic buildings have been carefully refurbished to their previous glory, with ornate wrought-iron balconies perched above grand arched doorways that look out onto cobblestone pedestrian zones. The stucco facades are painted in varying shades of sienna, sky blue, marigold yellow and soft pink, providing a vibrant visual palette when touring the historic city center on foot.



(Photo by Craig B. Thompson with GlobalVideoHQ)

For a more relaxed approach, hop on the Campeche Street Car at the Plaza de la Independencia—also known as El Parque Principal—for a leisurely tour of the city's main attractions, including historic neighborhoods, the Tukulna House of Crafts, and the Campeche Cathedral, which dates back to the 16th century.

On the north side of the square, El Palacio Centro Cultural houses a small museum featuring artifacts, interactive games, audiovisual displays, and replicas of ships and clothing.

On the weekends, the government building's gold-hued walls also act as a block-long screen for a free sound and light show called Videomapping Campeche. This spectacular feat of technology uses music and animation to tell the story of the city's roots, from the pre-Mayan era through modern day, and is not to be missed.

Campeche is the safest city in Mexico, and exceptionally family-oriented. In the early morning, people of all ages walk, jog and bike along the malecón—a two-mile-long waterfront promenade—and parents with young children stroll through the city square long after sundown.

Local fishing guides offer boat tours of the lush mangroves full of birds and hungry tarpon swimming in clear waters, while less than an hour's drive from the city, the Mayan temple at the archeological site of Edzná attracts travelers from all parts of the world. While the tourists head to Cabo and the college crowd hits Cancun, Campeche offers a rich cultural experience and exciting activities in a place that feels like a tropical home away from home.



(Photo by Craig B. Thompson with GlobalVideoHQ)

Aeromexico flies daily from DFW to Campeche International Airport with a connection in Mexico City. Prices start at \$381 at [www.aeromexico.com](http://www.aeromexico.com), with the cheapest days to fly being Tuesdays and Wednesdays.

Steps from the historic city center, the newly renovated Gamma by Fiesta Inn Campeche Malecón offers modern luxury at affordable prices. A standard king is \$55 and a junior suite is \$78 at current exchange rates on [www.gammahoteles.com](http://www.gammahoteles.com)

Dozens of excellent restaurants line Calle No. 59 in the historic city center. On the edge of town, El Faro del Morro boasts beautiful ocean views and outstanding seafood. After the meal, enjoy a shoreline tour on a replica pirate ship for 25 pesos, or just more than \$1 a person.