

## Palenque – San Cristobal de las Casas

137 Miles / 4-5 hours

Note: the drive time is just driving. If you plan to visit Agua Azul, allow about 2-3 hours extra. If you go to Bonampak, do it as a day trip from Palenque. You cannot go there, come back and drive to San Cristobal in daylight. And these roads are not ones you want to drive at night. Even I won't do it on a bet. You may want to end your day in Ocosingo instead of driving to San Cristobal in the dusk. There is a surprising amount of traffic in that small city. The downtown hotels are easy to see, but difficult to park near while you go look.



This is an example of a *deslave* (mudslide or washout of the side of the road) that can make driving this road dangerous, especially after dark. During the day, your only warning will be those orange cones or maybe a flagman who may or not be asleep. At night the flagman is home and the orange cones are not that bright. Neither is anyone who drives this at night.

Before you leave Palenque you really should drive to Bonampak (as a day trip), noted for its murals. It's 93 miles over a (mostly) paved road, but it will take you a couple of hours at least. You used to have to fly in and have a permit to visit. Now anyone can see it. It is stellar if you are an archeological buff.

From Frontera Corozal (10 miles farther) you can take a boat up the Rio Usumacinta to Yaxchilán. You can thank the *narcotraficantes* and human smugglers for the roads in this area. The army built the roads so they could get in and out quickly. For every negative there is a positive. It's too much to see both of these ruins the same day, so you will have make a two day trip of it. Will you ever get out of Palenque?



This is a good web site with stunning pictures. The lady who runs it makes reservations for hotels throughout the Cancun corridor, so if you need a hotel in the area, please use her services. <http://www.locogringo.com/chiapas/bonampak.html>

## Overview

This has got to be one of the most scenic drives in Mexico. As if the man-made mysteries of the ruins of Palenque were not enough to tempt your imagination into soaring, the natural beauty of Agua Azul could tip it over the edge, opening up new self-discoveries.

Chiapas is much different than the rest of Mexico. The population is even more indigenous than in Oaxaca and it looks and feels more like Guatemala. Outside the tourist zones, the locals really do not like to be photographed or to interact with tourists. There is extreme poverty in the villages and oppression that you will not likely see. But the cattlemen have *pistoleros* on their ranches to keep the peasants in line.

This area was the setting for B. Traven's *Jungle Novels* Traven was the author of *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre* which later became a movie directed by John Huston with Humphrey Bogart. Traven lived with the Indians here and wrote movingly, but not mawkishly about their lives. I met an old man in a fleabag hotel I stayed at on Isla Mujeres who had known Traven. It was a thrill to me. The Wikipedia article is not completely accurate but it is a start if you are interested.

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/B. Traven](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/B._Traven).

## Road Log



0.0 – Leave Howard Johnson's and go towards town. Turn RIGHT at the Big Head, towards ruins. (There is a discrepancy in mileage between the map and the roadlog. Put it down to odometer differences.



0.5 – Turn LEFT following MEX-199 (2 lane, paved, obvious) towards “Cascadas de Agua Azul” and “Misol Ha”. Blue signs. There is a big GAS on the right not far after turn. I suggest filling up here if you have not already.



Next 30 miles of road moderately winding, beautiful scenery. There are a couple of waterfalls and attractions to see along

the way. I never have, since it is difficult to fit in the main attraction, Agua Azul and getting to San Cristobal in one day. If you do decide to visit them all, plan on staying in Ocosingo.

3.5 – If to Hotel Nututun, it is left.

5.5 – Turnoff for Bonampak. The road is paved for 74.0 miles. Then at San Javier, you turn right onto a dirt trail for 9.1 Miles.

### Advisory

I might as well alert you to a potential situation. If you did not know about it, you might think it something dangerous. It is not. It is just aggravating. There will be Indian women and their children who will stretch a rope (some are too poor to own a rope, so they have a string) across the road, about the height of your windshield. The idea is for you to pay them a “toll.” I paid the first one and while I was fumbling for correct change, the old woman grabbed a few extra pesos from my hand and ran away. OK I am generous, but that chapped me. From then on I paid no tolls, but just kept going as I approached each string in the road. The kids are used to this and will drop it. I asked a Mexican if he paid and he said, “Well, these people are very poor. If I am feeling generous, I pay. If not, I drive on.” So it is up to you. You will see no more of these after about 10 miles past the turnoff for Agua Azul.

Consider yourself lucky. For years, the Zapatista Liberation Front (ELZN) really did collect tolls, and at the point of a submachine gun. Plus they lectured you on the evils of Capitalism once you paid.



12.0 Right for Cascadas de Misol Ha.

36.0 – Come to junction with road to Agua Azul. Turn right. There are signs.



Watch for livestock!

Go ½ mile to the entrance to the park (fee charged). Actually there are two “toll booths.” The first one is unofficial for the Zapatistas. I am sure they would not shoot you if you declined to pay, but what the heck, contribute to the cause, if indeed it makes it to the general fund. The second toll is official. Neither is large.



Agua Azul is a national park with very wide powerful waterfalls, inexplicably serene pools all with water that is literally turquoise, teal and other shades of blue. Some of the falls are only a few feet high and some are a few stories tall. While you will want to swim here, do so, but watch where other people are. Your kids especially could be swept away, and I don't mean by the beauty. The water can be dangerous from the force of the falls and many people have drowned. In fact choose who you watch carefully. It's about a kilometer hike from where you part to the lower falls. There is an "upper" section that's about an hour from there to El Cañon.

Alas, sometimes the waters are not all that "Azul." In winter or in the rainy season, they can be downright muddy-looking, depending on how recently it rained and how hard. But they are still quite impressive. I have seen them many times and only once was I snooked about the color.

There are some cabanas here. I would not stay in them, but if you are really roughing it, they might do. There is camping, but no RV park. You can boondock for a fee on a wide grassy spot. There are restrooms and changing areas and showers, but my experience is that they are not always spotless. Oh heck, they are sometimes gross. Frankly, I got a spooky feeling here and would not spend the night unless I had no other choice.



Mile 77.5 – Pass through Ocosingo.

This nondescript town was the flash point for the Zapatista uprising in Jan. 1, 1994. I drove through here on Dec. 28, 1993 and stopped for some reason. I do not think the revolution had anything to do with that. I do not think I offended anyone.

There are now decent hotels and restaurants and Wi-Fi in this town. It has grown since the uprising and I wonder if money was put into the development of it to appease the locals. Give a man a stake in the economy and he is less likely to become Communist.

If by any chance you left Aqua Azul late in the day. You might want to stay here. The road between here and San Cristobal is normally okay, but this is really not an area you want to drive after dark. And if there are any washouts (especially in the summer), consider yourself lucky if someone tied a rag to a tree limb to warn you. The sides of the road drop off into nothingness. These washouts are called *deslaves*.

Mile 135 – Pass huge Army base on right. Keep going straight to town.

Mile 137 – Arrive at outskirts of San Cristobal de las Casas. Altitude 7183 feet / 2190 meters. Getting to downtown and the hotels is rather trying. Stay on this big boulevard, alternatively called the *Calzada de la Quinta* or the Carretera Panamericana. It is congested. Follow signs for “Centro” or “Tuxtla”. When you see the big bus station on your right, go just past it and turn right onto Insurgentes. (This is kind of a Chinese fire drill with people letting passengers off etc. Try to stay to the left). Follow this until you see downtown. Several hotels are around the area within a few blocks of the zócalo.

Alternatively, just keep going straight for a few miles to the Hotel Bonampak, which is on the highway towards Tuxtla Gutierrez.

## **San Cristobal de las Casas**

This is a truly magical city. The air around here has a different “texture” than air anywhere else. The sky is shades of blue you don’t see elsewhere except Seattle WA (on both days when it is sunny in Seattle) and the greens of the vegetation must have been imported from Ireland. Artists love to paint here. However, the rest of us might get cold. At nearly 7,000 feet, this can be a very cold city in winter. The rest of the year it is merely “refreshing.”

Days are very nice, warm and sunny. It’s the nights that get you. There are indigenous people who come to the city to sell their handmade articles and to buy merchandise. Most people want to visit the local Indian villages of San Juan Chamula and Zinacantan. You really do need a guide to go there and to be allowed to take pictures. Seriously. I have gone without one myself and the people are just not that friendly to strangers. It is not that they are unkind, just reserved.

## **Hotels**

There are reasonably-priced hotels in this town. There may be a hotel that actually has heated rooms, but I guarantee that none under \$100 does. And few will provide you a heater, so ask before you check in. This town is very high up and cold to my way of thinking. The inexpensive ones are very generous with their blankets, though. Of interest is the Na-Balam institute of Mayan culture. There is also a Museum of Maya Medicine. One of the features is a video of a natural childbirth that may not be for everyone’s taste, so I thought I’d let you know.

Hotel Posada La Media Luna <http://www.hotel-lamedialuna.com/> It is 3 blocks from the downtown square and quiet. Moderately-priced. Hermanos Dominguez No. 5, Barrio Santa Lucia, San Cristobal de las Casas; Tel: (0052) 967 6315590 (around \$40).



### Our Location

[Our Location](#)   [How to Reach Us](#)

Our hotel is located in the heart of San Cristobal de las Casas, only 3 blocks south of the main place (el 'zocalo') and 4 blocks north of the Cristobal Colon bus terminal.

It is only some 20 metres away from 'el Andador', the main pedestrian road crossing the centre of the city, where you can find plenty of shops, bar and restaurants.

Most of the main tourist attraction of San Cristobal are within a few minutes walk from the hotel: the Santa Lucia church, the el Carmen arch, the zocalo, the Popular Cultures Museum, the Santo Domingo church and marketplace...

Bonampak – on the highway to Tuxtla Gutierrez. Expensive, but very nice. Also has RV park. Pricey, but convenient. <http://www.mundomaya.com.mx> PH 961-613-2050. Handicapped accessible. Around \$65.

Posada Diego de Mazariegos <http://www.diegodemazariegos.com/> Colonial-style hotel on the main square. Wi-fi. Rather expensive but there is a certain elegance about it. Febrero No. 1 y Ma. Adelina Flores No. 2 C.P. 29200 | Centro Histórico, Tels: (967) 6780833 - 6781825 | Fax (967) 6780827. Around \$55.

There is also a Holiday Inn and the Hotel Ciudad Real but I do not know them personally.

There are a couple of hotels that advertise as spas. The Spa Santuario del Alba , Julio Corzo #1-D, is simple, with 7 rooms and reasonably-priced. It had a nice feel to it. Rooms were reasonable at about \$40. PH: 967-631-6178.

The Hotel Casa Mexicana 28 de Agosto, is more of a boutique hotel, fancy and upper-class. It is priced at around \$100. PH: 967-678-0698.

**RV** - There are two RV parks, the Bonampak on the SW side of town and the Rancho San Nicolas on the east side. PH: 967-678-0057. It has grassy sites and I think a small lake (but am not sure about that). Very low-key and only small rigs and tenters can fit here. It is the right one for you.

Directions to Rancho San Nicolas (mellow place)

Coming in from Palenque on MEX-190, head towards town. At Av. Insurgentes, turn right. Go 7-8 blocks up to Francisco Leon. Turn right. Go about ½ kilometer (to the end). The trailer park is on the right. You should see some arches. PH: 967-678-0057.

Next, on to Sumidero Canyon, Tuxtla Gutierrez and to Oaxaca or the Pacific Coast.

End Palenque – San Cristobal