

## The Art Enthusiast's Guide To Mérida—A City On The Cusp Of A Creative Resurgence

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The legend of henequen—an agave plant once known in Mérida as “green gold”—is still chronicled as a miraculous accident. Locals will tell you that Zamná, a Mayan god and storied herbalist, was pricked by the plant’s spiky tip on an expedition to cultivate healing remedies. Out of misgivings for his god, one of Zamná’s trusted courtiers began to strike the agave with a stone. Hidden beneath the surface, string-like sisal fibers began to reveal themselves.

The discovery of sisal brought extraordinary wealth to the Yucatán Peninsula. These fibers were ideal for making rope, and their uses were plenty. In the 19th century, they became an essential commodity in building ships and grain-farming equipment. But like all success stories, periods of trial would follow. The arrival of Spanish conquistadors led to the eventual exploitation of the henequen plant and locals in the region. When the Mexican Revolution began in the 1920s, the new regime’s land reforms disbanded the estates controlled by conquistadors. And with the eventual development of newer technologies, the Yucatán lost its dominance in the henequen industry, and its era of wealth came to a close.

Decades later, once-abandoned haciendas and rusted facades are becoming spaces for creative expression. While an unchanging dense breeze still combs through Mérida’s cobblestone streets and courtyards, formerly deserted mansions have transformed into hotels, restaurants, galleries, and museums. Somewhere between past and present, glimpses of Mayan influence and Spanish colonialism are being met with contemporary styles. Mérida’s newcomers are drawing inspiration from a history threaded throughout the region in their quest for creative endeavors. So much so that the city was named the American Capital of Culture for a second time. It appears that the lost gift of henequen is giving once again.

## Where To Stay



Chablé Yucatán KENNY VISE

Formerly Hacienda San Antonio Chablé, a vast sisal estate, **Chablé Yucatán** has revived a 19th century structure that the jungle took over years ago. The nature-capped resort, which presides over 750 acres, exists today as an oasis for spa lovers equipped with pre-Hispanic-style temazcales, sprawling green lawns lit at night by fireflies, and a hydrotherapy playground with its very own cenote. Some 26 kilometers from Mérida, this secluded paradise comes alive with a bee sanctuary, pristine golf course and pool, and artful yet modern interiors, whether in one of their 40 casitas or in their Ixi'im Restaurant, home to the world's largest private tequila collection.

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