

# VOGUE

TRAVEL

## Why Mérida's New Creative Energy Makes It a Mexico Must-Visit

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For a Mexican city whose reputation tends to concentrate on its gilded age of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, some hundred years later, Mérida is experiencing a second coming. Between new hotels, restaurants, galleries, and museums, one way to describe the varied ventures in the city would be doing something new with something old: many of Mérida's residents are drawing inspiration from the sense of history threaded both within the city, and throughout the lush Yucatán peninsula, in their pursuit of these bold new ventures.



One need only stroll along the (in January, hot and humid) Paseo de Montejo—named after the Spanish conquistador who founded the city in 1542—to get a taste of the city's heyday, beginning in the final decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century with its exporting of *henequen*, a native plant. By 1900, the use of this 'green gold' as a major industrial textile had brought prosperity to the city. Still today, Mérida's tree-lined boulevards feature enormous, *art nouveau* mansions which vary from the romantically crumbling to the carefully preserved.

Unlike Mexico City, in Mérida one has the benefits of city life while being able to quickly and easily plunge into nature: the Yucatán region boasts around 8,000 cenotes, or natural freshwater sinkholes that, whether well-trodden or tucked away, are usually open for a dip. What's more, awe-inspiring ancient Mayan sites are never more than one or two hours away, including the unmissable Uxmal and Chichen Itza. (You'll also find that the work of many of the present-day architects and artists of Mérida subtly holds a mirror up to the distinctive Puuc style of those Mayan sites.)

Over the course of my stay in Mérida, most of the people I met didn't hesitate to tell me how liveable a city it is. You can cycle around town, cool down in cenotes all summer, and rent or buy unique heritage properties—plus, it's officially Mexico's safest city. (Even as a visitor, however, the city quickly unfolds as one of the country's most unmissable destinations.) With the further development of the historical center forthcoming—thanks to the creation of a new park, La Plancha, in an old rail yard—the coming year promises even more innovation within this Yucatán gem.

## Where to Stay

One of the benefits of Mérida as a city is just how easily you can get out of it—and if you fancy a break from the hustle and bustle of the center, look to [Chable Yucatán](#), an established resort just half an hour's drive from the airport. Located in the middle of dense Mayan forest, Chable is regularly voted one of Mexico's best hotels, and it only takes a short stay to realize why. Set across 750 acres of the Maya jungle, Chable was formerly a vast hacienda dating from the 18th century, and throughout the grounds, you'll come across the original, time-worn gates from that time.



The spa area overlooking a cenote at Chablé Yucatán. Courtesy of Chablé Yucatán

But among all this vastness—with aviaries, orchards and a private cenote all best explored by the provided bicycles—the resort's most impressive asset is a sense of genuine privacy. With an emphasis on personal casitas surrounded by lush greenery, as well as an in-house, world-class spa, Chable takes relaxation seriously. And rest assured that among all this breathtaking nature, the resort takes care to promote its protection and preservation: the hotel endeavours to promote the protection of endangered species local to the Yucatán and native plant restoration, as well as to reduce plastic use in every possible respect.



The master suite of the royal villa at Chablé Yucátan. Courtesy of Chablé Yucátan

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