

**Mexico (Gate 1) Trip – Dec. 9-21, 2022**  
**(Prepared By: Carey Beamesderfer)**

Mexico is a fascinating country, lying between the United States to the north, and Guatemala and Belize to the southeast. Its extensive coastlines of more than 6,200 miles include the Gulf of Mexico and the Caribbean Sea to the east and the Pacific Ocean to the west. Mexico has pleasant and warm weather, unique food, art and archaeology, pyramids, music, history, museums, haciendas, superb architecture and 21st century cities, weather from snow mountains in the Sierras, to rainy jungles in the Southeast and desert in the Northwest, numerous golf courses, excellent fishing, and world-class destinations like Acapulco, Cancun, Cozumel, Los Cabos, and Mazatlan. Mexico is ranked as the 7th major destination for foreign visitors, according to the World Trade Organization.

Gate 1 offered this tour to visit various archeological and cultural sites on an educational motorcoach tour beginning in México City, following the coast of the Gulf of Mexico, ending in Cancun on the Yucatan peninsula. The tour was hosted by an experienced travel guide who has a PhD in archeology. Julie Miller shared her knowledge and experience with a group of 22 travelers from various parts of the US, including myself and my friend Doug Borrett.

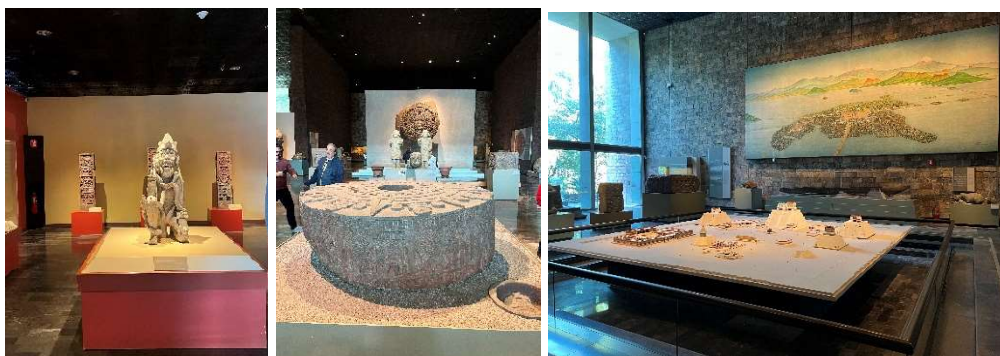
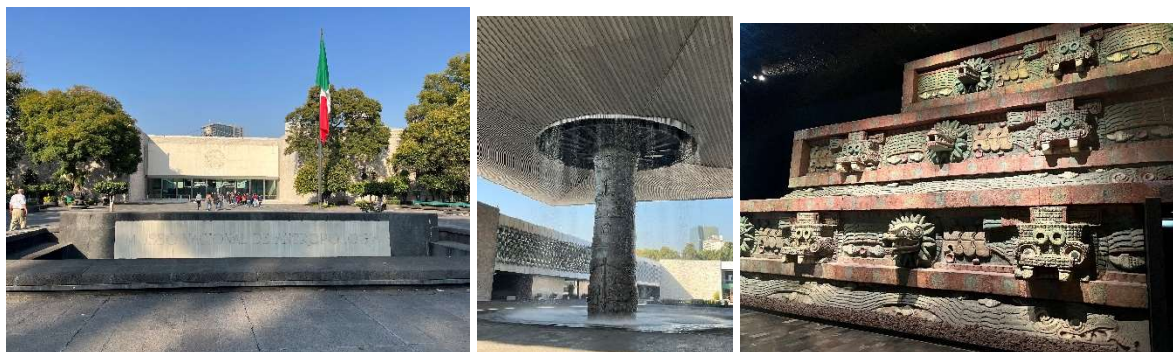


Gate 1 Tour Route

We flew from El Paso to Dallas on Friday, Dec. 9, arriving in Mexico City shortly before 4:00pm CST. We were picked up by a representative from Gate 1 and traveled in a Toyota Sienna through the crowded streets of Mexico City, the 3<sup>rd</sup> most populated city on the planet, to the Marquis Reforma hotel. We met our tour director and traveling companions at a 7:00pm orientation meeting in the hotel's restaurant. Doug & I went to a local restaurant, about 6 blocks from the hotel, with Julie, our tour guide, where she shared more of the details of her background and the exciting adventure ahead of us.

Before retiring for the night, we reviewed the guidebook that was given to each traveler. It included a brief Mayan history, a detailed description of the Landscape of the Yucatan peninsula, and a day-by-day itinerary of the tour. The next morning, we had breakfast at 7:00am to begin our tour.

Our first stop was the National Museum of Anthropology.



This is the largest and most visited museum in all of Mexico. Among the significant artifacts are the Aztec calendar stone, the giant heads of the Olmec civilization found in the jungles of Tabasco and Veracruz, as well as treasures and replicas from Palenque and Chichen Itza. Also on display is a model of the Aztec capital, Tenochtitlan, whose ruins can be seen around the Zocalo (the main square in Mexico City).

After a hearty lunch we were taken to the floating gardens (chinampas) in Xochimilco where we boarded a very colorful, flat-bottom boat (the trajineras) and toured the river canal along with 100+ other boats. This was an experience that will never be forgotten. The chinampas used to be a large agricultural hub and have been around as far back as the reign of the Aztec empire.



**Day 3 – Sunday – Dec. 11** – We didn’t realize that we were touring Mexico City the day before one of the most important holidays in all of Mexico. December 12, an “unofficial” holiday is one observed by millions of people from Mexico and from all over the world – the Virgin Mary of Guadalupe Day. As we entered the gate to the Metropolitan Cathedral of the Assumption of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary, we were blocked by an overwhelming crowd (estimated to be nearly a million people). We wandered through the crowd taking pictures as we attempted to gain access to the door to view the “image.”



← This is a reproduction of the actual image in the cathedral. It was taken at a nearby souvenir shop. The local guide advised us there was no physical way to get into the cathedral to see the actual image. The crowd was expected to exceed **10 million** people over a two day period.

Read the whole story of the Lady of Guadalupe at this website:

[Our Lady of Guadalupe | Description, History, & Facts | Britannica](#)

Our next stop was 32 miles northeast of Mexico City – Teotihuacan. This UNESCO World Heritage Site covers an area of 32 square miles, known today as the site of many of the most architecturally significant Mesoamerican pyramids built in the pre-Columbian Americas. Our first stop within the complex was at an overlook facing the Pyramid of the Moon (the 2<sup>nd</sup> largest temple in the city) then along the Avenue of the Dead to the Pyramid of the Sun (the largest building in the city – believed to have been built around 200 A.D.) The Avenue of the Dead is roughly 130 feet wide and 2.5 miles long. Further down, after a small river, is the area known as the Citadel, containing the ruined Temple of the Feathered Serpent Quetzalcoatl. This area was a large plaza surrounded by temples that formed the religious and political center of the city.



Pyramid of the Moon



Avenue of the Dead



Pyramid of the Sun

After lunch we were taken to the historic district of the city for a walking tour of the area. A UNESCO World Heritage site since 1987 the historic center occupies 668 blocks. Most of the buildings were constructed between the 16<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries over the ruins of Tenochtitlan, the center of the Aztec Empire.



The Art Story – Diego Rivera Museum



Benito Juarez Monument



Mayan Dancers in Center City



Ruins of an ancient Mayan temple



----- Various sites in the city -----

Dinner was on our own so Doug & I found a place within a couple blocks of the hotel, an Argentine restaurant known as the 10 Eldiez. This was before Lionel Messi and the Argentina soccer team won the World Cup. In any case, it was a great meal.



Day 4 – Monday – Dec. 12 – After breakfast at the hotel we left Mexico City heading to Puebla.



The city of Puebla is the fourth largest city in Mexico with 2.1 million inhabitants and the Capital of the State of Puebla. It was founded on April 16, 1531 as "La Puebla de los Ángeles". It was the first city in central Mexico founded by the Spanish conquistadors that was not built upon the ruins of a conquered Amerindian settlement. Its strategic location, between the port of Veracruz and Mexico City, made it the second most important city during the colonial period.

The city's main claim to fame is Cinco de Mayo, a festival commemorating the May 5, 1862 defeat of a French expeditionary army by Mexican general Ignacio Zaragoza. It was after this battle that the name of the city was changed to "Heróica Puebla de Zaragoza". The forts where the battle took place are a major tourist attraction of the city and the site of an annual month-long carnival marking the anniversary of the battle. The city is also famous for its cuisine, being said it is this city where "Mole" - a famous Mexican spicy thick sauce- was invented.



Walking tour of Puebla



Puebla Cathedral

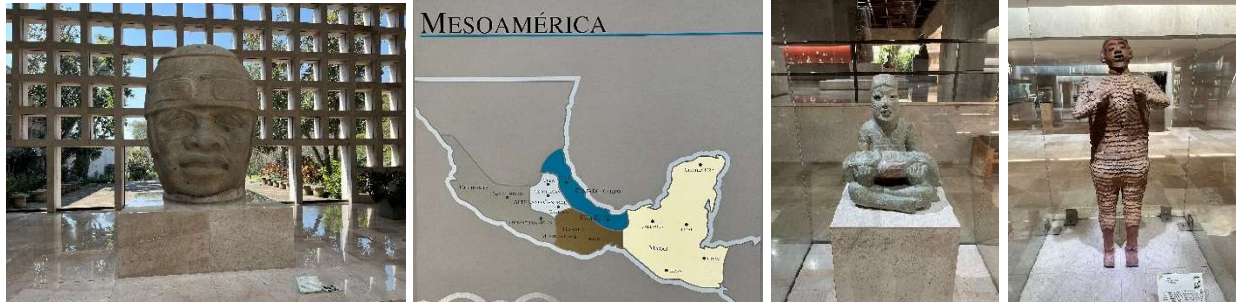


Doug sampling Mescal



"Vanilla Cookie Kings"

**Day 5 – Tuesday – Dec. 13** - Following an 8:00am departure our journey to Veracruz was delayed (in traffic) for 2 hours. In due time we arrived at the Xapala Anthropology Museum which houses the world's largest collection of artifacts from the Olmec civilization (considered to be the mother culture of Mesoamerica).



The Olmeca was the earliest known complex civilization to emerge in Mesoamerica and the wider Americas. It arose around 1600 to 1500 BC on the tropical gulf coast of what is now the Mexican state of Veracruz. There, the Olmecs were able to cultivate numerous agricultural crops such as maize, squash, beans, and chilis on a large scale, thanks to the hospitable climate of the region and the fertile soils of the Coatzacoalcos riverbanks. But despite the importance of the Olmecs in Mesoamerican history, little is known about this enigmatic civilization. In the absence of written records archeologists must try to decipher the history of this most mysterious of peoples from the abundant artifacts that have been discovered in the humid verdant jungles of Veracruz. And some of the most remarkable finds that have been unearthed from ancient Olmec sites are the famous and enigmatic colossal head sculptures. Examples of these gigantic sculptures, intricately carved from basalt boulders are thought to be depictions of ancient Olmec warrior rulers, who may have been worshipped as living gods. Even today, thousands of years later, these giant artifacts are imbued with undeniable expressive power and menace. From the steely and resolute facial expressions, the broken war-scarred noses resemble that of a seasoned professional boxer, while the glaring eyes radiate a fierce commanding presence.

Lunch was at a nearby hacienda/coffee plantation - Hacienda de Nuestra Señora de los Remedios



This property was built in 1592 by order of Don Juan de Quiroz and Don Sebastián Díaz, to plant and grind sugar cane on a property of Mr. Quiroz, called Nexapa. The hacienda was acquired in the seventeenth century by Mr. Don Luis Pacho y Mexía, from where it takes the name of Hacienda de Pacho, who managed the property until his death. Later in the eighteenth century, it was administered by Jesuits, who at the end of the century made it one of the largest estates in the region with almost 1,200 hectares of surface. Since then, it has had many owners and co-owners including the church and local, national and foreign landowners. In the mid-nineteenth century it was bought by Mr. José Julián Gutiérrez y Fernández, a very close friend of President Antonio López de Santa Anna. The Gutiérrez family is, since then, owner of the hacienda and it has been a coffee plantation for many years. The plantation has its own chapel, which the owner (our lunchtime host) allowed us to visit.

After arriving at our hotel – Gran Hotel Diligencias, our tour director led us on a short walking tour of the park and seaport area. Doug & I stopped for some ice cream (more like icy smoothies) then back to the hotel lobby to sit and chat with some of our fellow Gate 1 travelers. The park was decorated with lights and holiday cheer for Christmas.



----- The central park and seaport area in Veracruz -----

**Day 6 – Wednesday – Dec. 14** – After an early departure from Veracruz we were again delayed in traffic (for 3 hours this time) because of an overturned fruit truck. As a result, the drive to Palenque ended up being an all-day event. We arrived at our hotel at 9:30pm. Lunch was at a stop on-the-way, and we chose to skip dinner.

**Day 7 – Thursday – Dec. 15** – One of the highlights of this trip was today’s visit to the “jungle swathed” temples of Palenque, a national treasure of Mexico. Abandoned for unknown reasons, the vast, ruined city of Palenque is one of the most beautiful Mayan city states on the planet (a UNESCO World Heritage site since 1987). It was here that archeologists discovered the tomb of Mayan King Pakal. Today the site is filled with hundreds of ruined buildings, huge stones and stucco pyramids with intricate carvings and hieroglyphs.



Entering Palenque



Doug at the entrance to the Grand Palace & in the Tomb area



Temple of the Cross Group



Climbing to the Top



A View from the Top

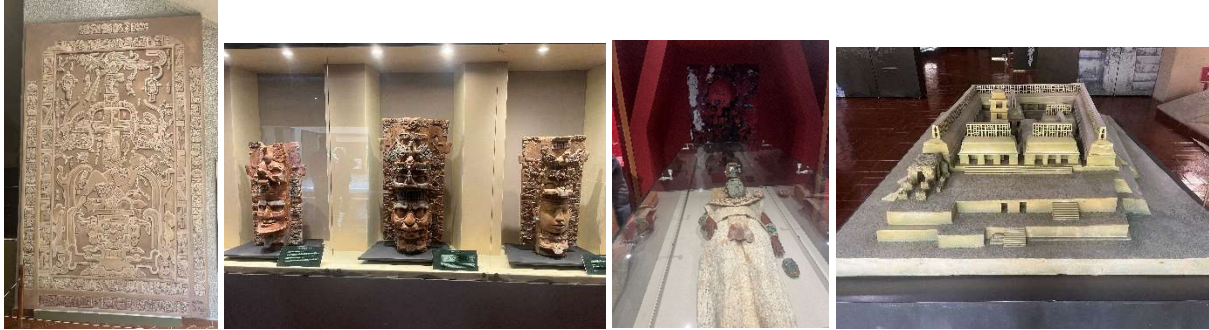
After the standard tour, our guide Julie, escorted us to a closed area of the site where she had worked as an archeologist in the late 1990’s. The temple area is known as Temple XIX and the team she was part of had done extensive work in the area to prepare it as a tourist site and for further archeological study. Unfortunately the site has not been maintained very well since that time and the jungle is beginning to reclaim it.



During the excavations of 1998 and 1999 a platform which has been interpreted as a throne was found inside the building. On the south and west sides reliefs commissioned by the ruling King Ahkal Mo Nahb III in 736AD were found.



Julie, our archeologist tour director, also led us through the Palenque Museum, and did an outstanding job explaining the treasures and artifacts we were seeing.



King Pakal Sarcophagus Lid – Statues Unearthed at Site    The Red Queen    Model of one of the Site Temples

Dinner this evening was a gastronomic experience in pre-Hispanic (Mayan) fusion cuisine.



Our dinner host specializes in authentic Mayan meals, and every course was made with ingredients used by the ancient Mayan people. It was a culinary experience like no other. The background of every course was explained in detail and the food was excellent.

^ The sign at the entrance to the home/restaurant.

**Day 8 – Friday – Dec. 16** – On our way today to historic Campeche – another UNESCO World Heritage site.

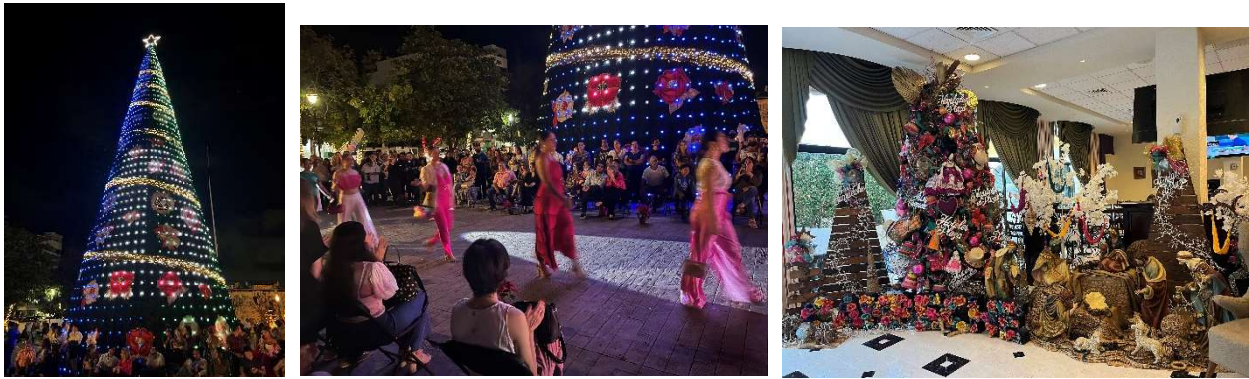
We stopped for a quick snack –  
quesadillos – made by this lady.  
→  
They were great. 👍



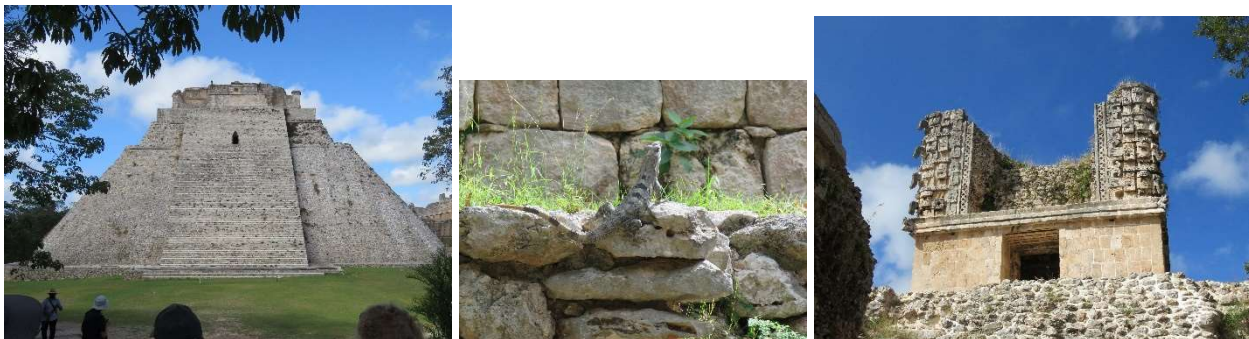
Did you know? The city of Campeche is surrounded by walls built to protect it from pirate attacks. The massive walls took approximately 18 years to complete, from 1686 until 1704. The hexagonal enclosure has a perimeter of 8,400 feet, and its height is over 26 feet.



Doug & I went to a Sound & Light show at the **walls** “Land Gate” that night, followed by a fashion show at the “Sea Gate.” The narration for the shows were done in Spanish so it made it difficult to follow. The town was decorated for Shristmas everywhere we went, including our hotel.



**Day 9 – Saturday – Dec. 17** – After breakfast we departed for Merida, traveling on highway 180. Along the way we stopped to visit the ancient Mayan city of Uxmal (another UNESCO World Heritage site). Uxmal means “thrice built” and part of the style is to build temple upon temple. We viewed the 100-foot-tall Temple of the Magician, which is dedicated to a Mayan rain god – Chac. Uxmal was founded around 500A.D., was ruled by the Xiu family & was the most powerful site in western Yucatan for a while.



West of the Pyramid of the Magician is the Nunnery Quadrangle, consisting of four rectangular buildings with 74 individual rooms. It might have been a palace or a residence for students, priests, or soldiers. Each of the four temple-sides of the quadrangle is decorated with Chac

figures. The central courtyard there measures 260 by 212 feet. South of the quadrangle is a ball court roughly 111 by 33 feet called *pok-ta-pok* in Mayan.



The Nunnery Quadrangle



The Ball Court

The Nunnery Quadrangle in Uxmal is an architectural complex made up of four structures on different platforms arranged around a large patio. Each facade presents a combination of designs related to different deities evoking cosmogonic concepts and a strong cult of fertility. **In the North building**, there are a total of 26 rooms that are arranged horizontally. The ornamentation is made of human figures, monkeys, birds and stylized Mayan huts with roofs of feathers, two-headed snakes, and of course, masks of Chac and Tlaloc. **In the South building** - The main access to the quadrangle is through a large arch located in this eight-roomed building. This arch has red hands painted that are believed to symbolize the god Zamna called the celestial hand. The decoration of the facade is composed of alternating smooth panels with groups of three columns that is completed with representations of Chac where the nose has been changed by ripples in the eyes, representing rain when falling. The facade of the **west building** has a length of 164 feet with six chambers and interior rooms. It's decorated by mosaics with feathered serpent motifs and geometric symbols, warriors and Chac masks. **The eastern building** has a length of 50m with five chambers, two of which have other interior rooms. The decoration of its walls mimics snake scales complemented by six groups of double-headed snakes arranged from the largest on the top, to smallest on the bottom and with owl heads, a bird associated with death. Chac's masks are also present on both edges.



Side view of the Pyramid of the Magician

The Pyramid of the Magician dominates the center of the complex and is located at the entrance to the central court. It is positioned on the eastern side of the city, with its western face overlooking the **Nunnery Quadrangle** and is situated so that its western stairway faces the setting sun at the summer solstice.



Pyramid of the Magician – 1913 (Before Restoration)

Our next stop was the Choco-Story Museum. Choco-Story explains the history of the milling of cocoa from its origin, distribution and uses around the world, to show its millenary forms of Mayan preparation. As many of the readers of this report know, I was employed by a chocolate company for more than 37 years, so I found this quite interesting.



We watched as cocoa was being ground into powder and put into a cup of water for us to drink. It had a very strong, dark chocolate, almost bitter taste. Part of this adventure included a Mayan ceremony. The Mayan world is one of the most developed cultures for its spirituality. One of the special moments is the ceremony in honor of the god Chaac. This drum beating, chanting, and dancing ceremony is held within the Choco-Story complex among the cocoa trees and an animal shelter. Near the end of the tour there was a kiosk with the question: Were any of these Cocoa related products familiar to you in your childhood. I was pleasantly surprised to find the following two pictures among the 50 or so photos in that kiosk.



After a brief walking tour of the city, we had dinner at the Crabster restaurant. ^

**Day 10 – Sunday – Dec. 18** – We are in Merida and ready for our bus tour of the city. It began at the Monument to the Fatherland then continued to the largest cemetery in Merida.



----- Monument to the Fatherland -----



This cemetery is typical of all cemeteries in the Yucatan area. Most are overcrowded and cleaned up once a year for the “Day of the Dead” celebration in late October.



The afternoon was on our own, so Doug & I walked several blocks (with another Gate 1 couple) to tour the Quinta Montes Molina – a majestic house museum of the early twentieth century, framed by beautiful gardens. The brief tour gave us a better understanding of the early life in Merida. We spent the rest of the afternoon hanging out at the hotel’s swimming pool.



Exterior view and several pictures from the interior of the Quinta Montes Molina house. The House Museum is the only one in the city that remains in its original state. In it you can see how the families of the city lived at that time. Completed around 1902, this magnificent house passed into the hands of the Montes Molina family in 1915 and has been preserved with everything and the original furniture of that time, through the four generations that have lived in it.

At 6:00pm we were taken to a local family's home for dinner and a tour of their home. This was a fun evening highlighted with a Mexican meal followed by a birthday cake for one of the Gate 1 travelers – Patrick.



Mexican family dinner in a local home



Patrick's 72<sup>nd</sup> birthday



Doug learning how to get in and out of a hammock

**Day 11 – Monday – Dec. 19** – We left at 8:30am for Izamal, one of Mexico's magical towns. Izamal is stunning both in the brilliant yellows which color the main square and most of the buildings in the city, but also the rich cultural ties that connect the past to the present. We also stopped at the Kinich Kakmo Archeological site where I climbed to the top of the pyramid.



Later that day we visited a local artisan who showed us his skills in grinding and polishing nuts from a tree in his yard and creating jewelry from them and the stems of yucca plants.



Our guide chose to have the Farewell dinner tonight (one day early) at the resort where we were staying. She said it fit the itinerary better because of the meal selection and location. We were entertained at the dinner by a very professional, highly experienced mariachi band and we finished the dinner with a dance around the table. Great fun.



Our Farewell dinner was held at the Mayaland Hotel & Bungalows Resort.

**Day 12 – Tuesday – Dec. 20** – Today we left early to visit the famous ruins of Chichen Itza. It is one of the Seven Wonders of the World, a UNESCO site and considered by many to be the most spectacular of all Mexico’s Mayan sites. The entire site is dominated by the Temple of Kukulcan, the plumed snake god that led the Toltec on their migration to Yucatan. At the foot of its stairs lurks a large carved snakehead that, at the spring and fall equinox, casts a shadow as if Kukulcan were twisting out of the temple and slithering down the pyramid.



The Gate 1 group photo at the base of the Kukulcan Pyramid – Chichen Itza



The Observatory on the grounds at Chichen Itza



Lunch was near the site, and it gave us an opportunity to visit two of the cenotes in the area. A cenote is a natural sinkhole filled with freshwater. It was formed when the limestone bedrock collapsed into the fresh groundwater. With its extensive underground river systems, the Yucatan peninsula of Mexico is the world's best place to experience and explore cenotes. There are over 3,000 cenotes in Mexico, mostly in the area covered by the Chicxulub crater, the crater that was formed after the meteorite impact that extinguished dinosaurs. The word has Mayan origins, dzonot or ts'onot meaning well. They played a crucial role in the development of Mayan civilization as well. Since the Yucatan peninsula has very few rivers and lakes the cenotes represented the main source of water. Consequently, Mayan settlements were built next to a cenote, including Chichen Itza. Mayans believed that the cenotes were openings to the underworld. It is easy to see why they held that belief. Diving inside the cenotes reveals a whole new world of interconnected subterranean rivers with stalactites hanging in the turquoise waters. Many of the Yucatan cenotes contain remains of offerings to the gods. For instance, at the Sacred Cenote of Chichen Itza (Cenote Sagrado), Mayans paid tribute to the god of rain, Chac. Nowadays the cenotes represent a major draw for tourism in the region as divers explore their depths.



In the afternoon we drove the rest of the way to a resort in Cancun – the Occidental Costa Cancun where we stayed for the night.

**Day 13 – Wednesday – Dec. 21** – We had the morning free, so Doug and I made our way to a rotating tower which took us to a scenic point high above the city. After that we said goodbye to our fellow Gate 1 travelers and were taken by van to the airport for our trip home.

**Summary:** It was a fantastic trip, especially during the Christmas season. The pyramids were awesome; and the opportunity to physically see the pyramids and other ancient artifacts, and learn more about the Olmec, Mayan and Aztec cultures was something one simply cannot get in a classroom environment. It reaffirmed the fact that I feel fortunate to live in a time when many people recognize that education is not only books and tests, but experiences and memories that shape our mind and our future. Keep traveling – and remember – there is no passion to be found in settling for a life that is less than the one you are capable of living. - Carey Beamesderfer 12/25/2022 – Merry Christmas