

## Sustainability Guide: Mexico

You are about to embark on a unique, one-of-a-kind trip to the southeast part of Mexico known as the Yucatan Peninsula. Mexico boasts rainforests that at one time connected with the Amazonian rainforests. These forests not only include an abundance of wildlife but also host indigenous populations that are completely untouched by the modern world. Mexico's rich cultural history is directly tied to its natural beauty and wildlife.

### Environmental Issues:

Mexico, however, also suffers from environmental problems that threaten biodiversity and the rainforests that are essential to maintaining the ecosystems of the country. Some of the environmental issues are the following:

- Oil drilling along the Gulf of Mexico poses dangers to aquatic systems
- Deforestation from cattle grazing and agriculture threatens the rainforests and the biodiversity within
- Soil erosion is the result of deforestation: without the trees to hold the soil in place, the soil is washed into rivers and streams and clogs them with sediments
- Air pollution is the result of an expanding urban population and booming industries; air pollution not only affects the health of the Mexican people but it also degrades the environment and native flora and fauna.

### Environmental Initiatives:

As a result of these environmental issues, Mexico is taking steps to preserve its natural habitats and wildlife. A particularly interesting and inspiring story can be seen in the conservation efforts in Chiapas, Mexico. The local community of Chiapas has taken measures to preserve the species of manatee that inhabits Chiapas' wetlands. Research has shown that locals are changing their habits and are promoting conservation of the species. The locals have been trained by conservation groups on how to keep track of manatee sightings and are involved with rescuing individual, stranded manatees. A manatee festival is held once a year with intensive participation by local inhabitants, including adults and children; it has now become a protected and respected symbol to the community.

The rainforests of Mexico are very unique, as they are part of the rainforest network that extends down to the Amazon. The forests contain hundred of species that have their origin in the Amazon basin. The forests also contain populations of indigenous people whose traditional lifestyle is severely threatened. In the Los Tuxtlas region of the Mexican rainforests, only 20-30% of the original forests remain today. Public and government concerns over protection of these rainforests have resulted in about 70% of the region being declared as the *Los Tuxtlas Biosphere Reserve*. This has led to a decline in deforestation and the incorporation of rural communities into conservation and restoration projects.

Mexico was the first Mesoamerican country to sign the ratification on initiatives in the *International Convention on Biological Diversity* in 1993. The three main goals of the convention are the conservation of biodiversity, sustainable use of its components, and fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from resources. Its objective is to develop national strategies for the conservation and sustainable use of unique flora and fauna. From this convention, Mexico developed *National Protected Areas* (NPAs) in southern Mexico as biosphere reserves, ecological and community reserves, and national parks. About 15% of the land in southern Mexico is under some sort of protection. Recently, Mexico has begun to participate with bordering countries in the *Mesoamerican Biological Corridor Project*. The mission of this project is to avoid isolation and fragmentation of NPAs by establishing a series of corridors that will connect rainforests and allow movement of wildlife to promote sustainable use of biodiversity and the land.

As a visitor to this exotic country, you can take part in preserving the natural beauty Mexico has to offer. One way to protect Mexico's tropical rainforests is to be aware that they are there: the forests are the northernmost representations of the Amazonian rainforest and are the closest rainforests to the United States. They store huge amounts of natural resources. The forests are also the winter homes of the majority of North American songbirds and home to indigenous populations that add to the cultural wealth of North America. You can help in conservation by visiting these rainforests and supporting local conservation efforts which raise public awareness. As a traveler with Elevate Destinations, you are fortunate enough to be staying in the top eco-lodges in Mexico which are committed to preserving Mexico, its wildlife and natural resources.

### **Guide to Eco-Lodges in Mexico**

**Hacienda Santa Rosa** is located on the Yucatan Peninsula. This Hacienda is especially connected with the village of Santa Rosa and surrounding communities. 100% of the employees at Hacienda Santa Rosa are residents of the Village of Santa Rosa and in fact a large majority of the workers are descendents of the original family that owned the Hacienda. The revitalization of the Hacienda has led to many social projects, which local inhabitants take part in even if they are not working at the Hacienda. The projects, which involve handicrafts and manual arts, allow locals to use natural elements and traditional methods. Such works are sold in the Hacienda store to guests and used to garnish the rooms at the Hacienda. Recently, locals have also been trained as therapists for the Hacienda spa. Many of their descendents were Mayan *sobadoras* or bone healers, contributing to the importance that the Hacienda places on ancient traditions. This provides work for women who would not otherwise have a chance for such employment options. The Hacienda also provides a trip to the Celestun Biosphere Reserve. This lagoon is renowned for the pink flamingos that nest on the shores. One can also see species of heron, owls, endangered sea turtles, crocodiles, and experience the mangrove swamps. Hacienda Santa Rosa is part of the Fundacion Haciendas del Mundo Maya, responsible for the finances and supervision of projects in the village of Santa Rosa.



**Hacienda Temozon** is also located on the Yucatan Peninsula. Much like Hacienda Santa Rosa, Temozon is very connected with the local community: 90% of the employees are locals of the village of Temozon Sur. This Hacienda has also implemented social projects that draw on the traditional skills of the local Temozons. These projects have provided employment options for the villagers that without the Hacienda would not exist. Hacienda Temozon is also part of the Fundacion Haciendas del Mundo Maya that finances and supervises all the projects in the community of Temozon Sur.

**Hacienda Uayamon** is located on the Yucatan Peninsula and is very integrated with the local village of Uayamon. 90% of the employees at the Hacienda are villagers of Uayamon, providing them with employment opportunities that would not exist without the Hacienda. The Hacienda, much like Santa Rosa and Temozon, provides social projects that draw on the villagers' traditional knowledge in handicrafts and manual arts. Hacienda Uayamon is also part of Fundacion Haciendas del Mundo Maya.