

PUERTO CHIAPAS and TAPACHULA



Pool at the Puerto Chiapas Cruise Port

Personal Experience

This will be our third time in this port. The last time we visited on the Jewel, we stayed in the Port enjoying several brews, dunks in the Pool and then quickly back into the shade. The sun here is “wicked” to put it mildly.

On previous visits, we did the chocolate tour and the ruins tour. We never really had a chance to walk around Tapachula on our own. I haven’t been able to find anything on line to help with a Self Guided Walking Tour. We have decided to find a taxi or something and a tourist map at the pier this time.

Here is some FYI information I appropriated from several sources.

Puerto Chiapas is a small port town that handles the export of agricultural products grown in the Soconusco region, an area of rich lowlands and foothills. The surrounding area has some beautiful beaches, including Playa Linda in Puerto Chiapas and San Benito.

Your ship will dock at the Puerto Chiapas Cruise Terminal. On arrival, don't be surprised to see musicians and dancers in colorful costumes performing on the pier as you disembark.

The park-like terminal consists of two buildings: one is home to the pier market, with several vendors selling their wares, as well as a performance space. The other building features a bar and restaurant, along with internet access. All of the tours offered by the cruise lines will begin ship side in the terminal. Here you'll also find the desks of several tour agencies that offer guided excursions (with English-speaking guides) to the area's sights, as well as taxi drivers who also offer day tours of Tapachula, the Izapa ruins and the area's beaches.

Puerto Chiapas is the staging point for all of your day's activities for the area. Tapachula, the main commercial center of the area, is a 30-minute drive away. Paradoxically, despite the general poverty of the area, the city has one of the highest per capita gross domestic incomes in Mexico. The archaeological ruin of Izapa is also nearby.

In December 2012, the world's attention was drawn to Chiapas--and particularly the Izapa ruins--as this site is believed to be where the Mayan calendar was developed. The calendar is 5,126 years long, and its last day is December 21, 2012. This was to be the end of the world, and people and media from near and far made their way to witness this cataclysmic event at the ruins. Alas, the end has yet to come, but that just gives you extra time to visit Puerto Chiapas and all that it offers. Many cruise passengers say that this is at the top of their favorite ports.

The Soconusco region is also the entry point for many undocumented aliens transiting from Central America to points north. After all, in this area you're only several miles away from the Guatemalan border.

Time Zone

Puerto Chiapas is on Central Time, six hours earlier than Greenwich Mean Time during standard time, or five hours during daylight savings time. Daylight savings time begins on the second Sunday of March, and ends on the first Sunday of November.

Currency

The **Peso** is Mexico's official currency, and uses the \$ sign to denote the peso amount. Each peso is made up of 100 centavos. Bills come in denominations of \$20, \$50, \$100, \$200, \$500 and \$1000 pesos. Coinage comes in denominations of 50 centavos, and \$1, \$2, \$5 and \$10 pesos.

Just be aware that larger notes (e.g., \$500 Peso notes) are often difficult to change.

The US Dollar/Mexican Peso exchange as of 6/20/2016 is 18.669 Pesos equal 1 USD. One should check a few days before travel to Mexico.

Pesos, or credit cards for that matter, would probably be a better way to pay for the things you're going to buy in Puerto Chiapas or Tapachula. Some shops and restaurants will accept US dollars, but your exchange rate will be less than the market rate. And if you do use dollars in a smaller shop, they more than likely won't have change for anything larger than a \$20 bill, unless the change is in pesos.

Weather

Puerto Chiapas and Tapachula have a hot and humid tropical climate. The mean high and low temperatures vary very little during the year, with average monthly highs in the middle 80s F and the average monthly lows in the low 70s.

It is very humid in the Puerto Chiapas area, particularly during rainy season. The rainy season begins in earnest in June, with the season lasting through October. The annual rainfall averages 87 inches. When rainfall comes, the storms are usually relatively short, with a tendency toward sudden, heavy afternoon and evening showers or rainstorms.

Internet Access in Puerto Chiapas and Tapachula

Internet access through Cyber Cafes and Wi-Fi hotspots is available in both Puerto Chiapas and Tapachula. There is an internet cafe in the Cruise Terminal of Puerto Chiapas, across from where your ship docks; the ship's crew enjoys using this facility.

You can find several cyber cafes in Tapachula. Rates are reasonable, running from \$20 to \$50 pesos per hour. Here are a few choices for cyber cafes in Tapachula:

TapachulaWeb, No. 7 Poniente 19, Tapachula

Cyber Cafe "The Zone", Av Central Sur 92A, Tapachula

Cyber y Capturas de Tesis, 20-A Calle Poniente No.24, Tapachula

Puerto Chiapas History

Some historians assert that geography is destiny. In the case of the Soconusco region of Chiapas, its relative isolation from the central powers of Mexico has resulted in it being left pretty much alone for much of its history.

Soconusco residents can trace their history back over 3,700 years, to primitive hierarchical societies whose ruins remain to be seen at Izapa. The Aztecs were much more recent overlords, having asserted authority over the area just two decades prior to the Spanish conquest of Mexico.

After Mexican independence from Spain in 1821, the Soconusco region became part of the United Provinces of Central America, and in 1841, the area was subsumed by Guatemala. It wasn't until 1881 that the region once again became part of Mexico. In the mid-1880s, the Soconusco region witnessed substantial immigration from foreign countries, notably from Germany; these Germans established many coffee-growing “fincas” in the region. This investment led to substantial economic growth and regional prosperity. Today, Tapachula, the capital of Soconusco, enjoys one of the highest GDPs in all of Mexico.

Archaeological evidence shows that somewhere around 1750 B.C. the inhabitants of the Soconusco region had developed a hierarchical village society, with larger, more elaborate houses presumably reserved for chieftains.

The Aztecs conquered Soconusco a few decades before the Spanish arrived. Before its subjugation, the region had been relatively isolated, protected from the rest of Mesoamerica by the mountains of the continental divide - Sierra Madre del Sur. Inhabitants at the time of the Spanish conquest included the Mames (Maya), with isolated Nahuatl establishments, as can be seen at the ruins of Izapa.

The Soconusco was at the fringes of the Aztec empire, and provided jaguar pelts, cacao and quetzal feathers for the ruling classes in Tenochtitlan, the Aztec capital.

Soconusco means “high quality chocolate” in Spanish.

The Spanish, under the command of Pedro de Alvarado, conquered the Soconusco region in February 1524, during Alvarado's expedition to Guatemala. The Soconusco region was then part of the Kingdom of Guatemala (also known as the Captaincy General of Guatemala), an administrative division that was comprised of the countries of Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, El Salvador, Guatemala and the Mexican state of Chiapas. In turn, the Kingdom of Guatemala was a dependency of the Viceroyalty of New Spain, or Mexico. During the Colonial period, the Soconusco region was sparsely populated and engaged primarily in agricultural pursuits.

Tapachula originated as a small village on the banks of the Coatan River, the "River of the Serpent," settled by a community of people speaking a Mixe-Zoque language. During the Colonial period, there was no mention of a town until 1794, when it replaced Esquintla as seat for the authorities of the Soconusco region. Tapachula was the home of Fray Matias de Cordoba, main architect of Chiapas independence.

Mexico won her 11 year struggle for independence from Spain in August 1821; at the same time, the Kingdom of Guatemala effectively ended after the Guatemalan elite rebelled against their Spanish overlords. Upon receiving independence, Soconusco, together with the rest of the Kingdom of Guatemala, joined the First Mexican Empire under Agustin de Iturbide in 1822.

When the First Mexican Empire was dissolved in 1823, after the signing of the **Plan de Casa Mata**, the Central American entities demanded independence from Mexico. They subsequently created the United Provinces of Central America in 1823. A series of plebiscites were held to determine whether individual regions favored joining the federation, remaining in Mexico, or separately declaring independence. Chiapas was the only province to favor remaining in Mexico. Despite the results of the plebiscite, on July 24, 1824 rebels in Soconusco proclaimed its separation from Chiapas and its annexation to Guatemala and the United Provinces of Central America. On the following August 18, the National Assembly of Central America accepted the annexation, and on May 25, 1825 Central American troops occupied the region. After the dissolution of the United Provinces of Central America in 1841, Soconusco authorities petitioned for its reincorporation into Mexico. The issue between Mexico and Guatemala remained unresolved until a boundary treaty was signed on September 27, 1882, when Guatemala gave up its claims to Soconusco and Chiapas.

Impact of Foreign Immigration

In 1883, the Law of Colonization was passed, permitting foreigners to acquire, through concessions, extensions of territory with the purpose of colonizing and developing its resources. Shortly thereafter, thousands of Germans immigrated to the Soconuscan region during the coffee boom of the mid-1880's, creating numerous German villages, haciendas and fincas throughout the territory. Many of the descendents of these early settlers continue to maintain these coffee growing properties. The investments and the entrepreneurial skills of these immigrants helped generate substantial economic growth as had never been seen in any city within Chiapas, during either Colonial or Republican times.

The Japanese and the Chinese also left a strong influence in Tapachula, in both cuisine and architecture. They came to construct railroads, and were among the first Asian immigrants in Latin America.

Today's Tapachula

Tapachula is a pleasant, neat but relatively expensive commercial town about a half-hour's drive from Puerto Chiapas. It is both a town (with a population of over 190,000 people) and a Municipality, incorporating several surrounding regions, including the beaches of Playa Linda and the port of Puerto Chiapas. The town has a very culturally diverse population, including Native Americans and Mestizos, Spanish, German, Chinese, Japanese, French and others. Tapachula boasts one of the highest Gross Domestic Products of any city in Mexico.

Hurricane Stan, which arrived in 2005, dumped massive amounts of rain on the area, and produced substantial damage to the area.

Here's a few Tapachula highlights:

Parque Hidalgo (Hidalgo Park). This is the central square of Tapachula, and it is where the *Tapachultecos* hang out. The park offers entertainment and relaxation under shade trees, and is a good place to get a pulse of this hot and humid border city. Surrounding the park you'll find the House of Culture, the Portal Perez and the outdoor theater, where daily marimba concerts are performed, and shops and restaurants.

Casa de Cultura (House of Culture). Tapachula's erstwhile Municipal Palace (City Hall), this museum features displays of antiques and artifacts relating to the area. The two-story building is as enigmatic as its contents, as it is one of Chiapas' most notable examples of 20th century architecture. It was built in 1929 in the Art Deco style that was in vogue in Mexico City during the 1920s and 30s. *Tapachulteco* nationalism is reflected in the figures that flank the main facade of the building, including the *Oaxaquena* borders, the Aztec warriors, the stylized serpents and the coats of arms of both Mexico and Chiapas. Located at the central town square.

Parroquia de San Agustin (The Parish Church of San Augustine). This modest church was built in the late eighteenth century. The church was built in a classical style with Ionian columns, and has a wooden roof covered with adobe tiles. Hours: 8:00 am to 1:00 pm, and 6:00 pm to 9:00 pm daily. Located at the central town square.

Pantheon Municipal (Municipal cemetery). Tapachula's municipal cemetery provides good examples of funeral art; look for graves with German or Chinese names. The most interesting examples date from the turn of the 20th century. Located about 6 blocks southwest of Parque Hidalgo, at the corner of 8a Avenida Sur and 8a Calle Oriente.