

Escape

Mexico's Hidden

Magic

BY PAUL RUBIO

*Discover sophisticated cities and natural
hideaways along Mexico's road less traveled*



Holbox

ENCOUNTER
WHALE SHARKS
(RIGHT) AND
STAY CLOSE TO
NATURE AT LAS
NUBES DE HOL-
BOX (ABOVE).

A long yet narrow sliver of mangrove and beach off the northern tip of Mexico's Yucatán Peninsula, Holbox (pronounced hole-bosh) has managed to evade the lexicon of travel know-it-alls and tourist hordes. Its unspoiled state, however, is no secret to its primary residents: wild flamin-

gos, whale sharks, and a single boho-chic fishing village, home to about 2,000 locals.

Translated as "Black Hole" in Mayan, Holbox lives true to its name as a vortex of simplicity where globalization disappears. There are no roads, no cars, and minimal technology here, so

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MEDITATE ON THE BEACH BEFORE RETREATING TO YOUR SUITE AT THE CASA SANDRA (ABOVE AND LEFT) OR ENJOY BREAKFAST ALFRESCO AT LAS NUBES DE HOLBOX (RIGHT).



living in the moment comes naturally. Days rarely stray from lounging under a thatched-roof beach cabana or ambling along the island's contiguous lagoon. If visiting between May and September, the height of whale shark season, then an experiential snorkeling encounter with the world's largest extant fish is a must.

Development exists solely across Holbox's westernmost section. There, the hotels span the entire 1-mile width of the island and sandy roads lead from a Main Square to lanes of small shops and Caribbean-style wood shacks housing tour operators and no-shoes-required restaurants. Holbox's unpaved highway ends at its easternmost structure, the boutique hotel

Las Nubes de Holbox (lasnubesdeholbox.com), where the upstairs master suites grant the best ocean views and superlative flamingo encounters. Slightly closer to "town," the 12-room Casa Sandra (casasandra.com) champions a delightful barefoot sophistication without tarnishing the old-school Mexican bucolic charm. Its exterior showcases iconic Mexican architecture, with whitewashed walls and a thatched-palapa roof, but its interiors, clad in hand-embroidered pillows and tapestries, imbue this paradisiacal boutique hotel with a familiar tinge of luxury.



REMÈDE SPA AT THE ST. REGIS MEXICO CITY

Mexico City

Mexico's capital bursts with the passion, colors, and flavors of the country's 31 diverse states, offering a welcome urban retreat from the typical beachside circuit. While there's no shortage of places to flash your pesos in the world's eighth richest city, the wealth of free historic and cultural spectacles are the true highlights. Chapultepec, Mexico City's Central Park equivalent, is peppered with world-renowned museums such as the Museo Nacional de Antropología (mna.inah.gob.mx), home to the Aztec calendar stone *Piedra del Sol* and the fairy tale-like *Castillo de Chapultepec*. Teotihuacán, one of the largest pyramidal structures built in the pre-Columbian Americas, is just a short drive from the city center and is an impressive, lesser-known site that easily rivals Mexico's more famous ruins.

Mexico City is a mosaic of neighborhoods, or *colonias*. On Saturdays, the San Angel neighborhood hosts a sophisticated arts and crafts market focusing on the dearly departed; skeletons replace the living in portraits,



EXPLORE TEOTIHUACÁN (ABOVE) AND VIEW DECORATIVE TRAJINERAS ALONG THE CANALS OF XOCHIMILCO (LEFT).

figurines, and sculptures to show adoration for the afterlife. Flowery, oversize Mexican gondolas, known as *trajineras*, float young lovers and festive groups along the canals of Xochimilco. The boutiques, galleries, bistros, and cafés of chic districts like La Condesa, La Roma, and Polanco buzz with the country's growing bourgeoisie.

Come nightfall, check out the city's high-design eateries. For an evening of sophisticated dining, sample haute Spanish cuisine at Tezka (tezka.com.mx) in the Zona Rosa neighborhood or head to Polanco's La Tecla (latecla.com.mx) for pursuits in creative modern Mexican gastronomy. Later, retreat to your posh digs at the skyscraping St. Regis Mexico City (starwoodhotels.com), designed by Cesar Pelli of Malaysia's Petronas Towers fame.

San Miguel de Allende

The rogue city that helped launch the Mexican War of Independence is now making history as the country's most glamorous destination. San Miguel de Allende, an eighteenth-century colonial town in the heart of Mexico's central highlands, sparkles with UNESCO World Heritage grandeur, captured in its colorful streets, stunning gardens, neoclassical monuments, neo-gothic churches, and ba-



GET LOST IN SAN MIGUEL DE ALLENDE'S COLORFUL SIDE STREETS.

FROM TOP: PUMPKIN RISOTTO AT MOXI; PAROQUIA DE SAN MIGUEL ARCHANGEL.

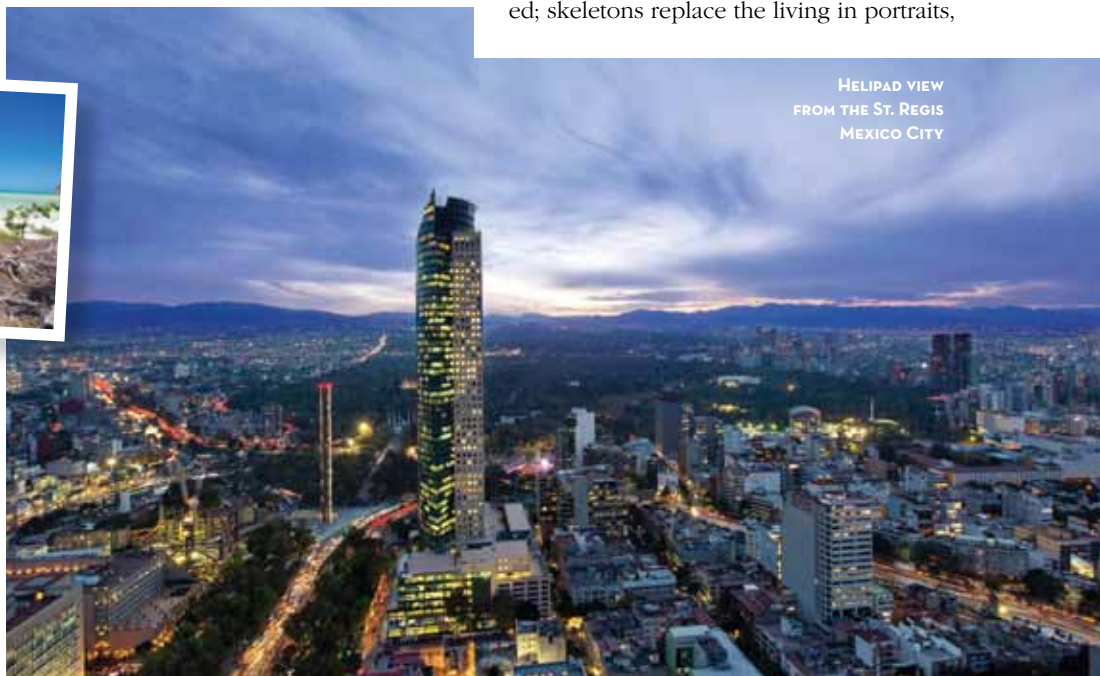
roque-style homes.

Influenced by the region's architectural customs, the Rosewood San Miguel de Allende (rosewoodhotels.com/en/sanmigueldeallende) was built like a traditional Mexican *hacienda*, with expansive rooms that surround either a central courtyard or aromatic fields of lavender. Arched domes lead from one building to the next, each corridor lined with art and ending at a different modern marvel. Pick a direction and discover a cabana-lined infinity pool, or a wine cellar dedicated to artist Frida Kahlo and constructed from

AT LAS NUBES DE HOLBOX, YOU'RE NEVER FAR FROM THE OCEAN.



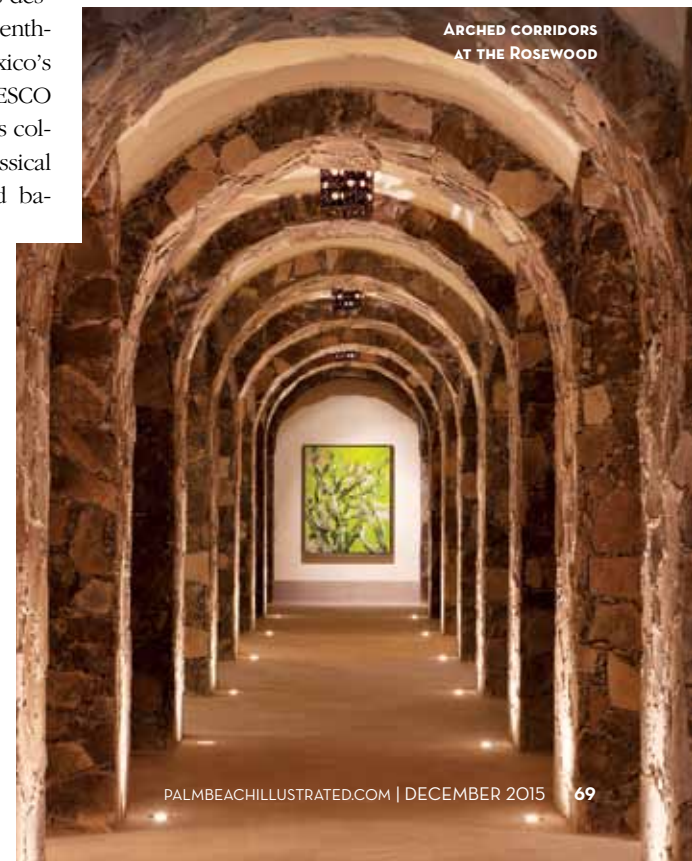
HELIPAD VIEW FROM THE ST. REGIS MEXICO CITY



FROM LEFT: OLIVE CAKE WITH CREAM CHEESE AND PASSIONFRUIT SAUCE AT TEZKA; CHAPULTEPEC IN MEXICO CITY.



ARCHED CORRIDORS AT THE ROSEWOOD



Escape

SAMPLE TEQUILAS
AT THE ROSE-
WOOD'S 1826 TE-
QUILA BAR (LEFT)
OR VISIT ONE
OF THE CITY'S
MANY COLONIAL
CHURCHES
(RIGHT).



local river rock, or the Luna Rooftop Tapas Bar, which serves eclectic bites alongside an extraordinary view of Mexico's oldest town.

In San Miguel de Allende, no map is required. Meandering with no concern for the destination provides ample opportunity to snap photos of the red, rust, and yellow kaleidoscope of buildings, browse petite museums, and discover esoteric galleries and boutiques tucked into alleyways. At some point, however, be sure to find your way to Moxi (moxi.com.mx), helmed by Mexico's current "it" chef, Enrique Olvera. Feast on Olvera's play on traditional Mexican dishes, like eggplant mole and pumpkin risotto with squash

blossoms. Afterward, stop by the Casa Dragones (casadragones.com) showroom for a tequila tasting. A visit here is by invitation only but can be arranged by your concierge at the Rosewood. A tour of this seventeenth-century estate comes with gourmet food paired with tequila, and not just any tequila—Dragones' 100-percent blue agave Joven tequila is consumed only in its purest form. Like a great work of art, each bottle is hand engraved, signed, numbered, and dated. ◀◀



current

PROMOTION AND EVENTS • DECEMBER 2015

ANN NORTON SCULPTURE GARDENS

The Ninth Annual Festival of Trees, "The Joy of Holiday Traditions, Celebrating Family Heritage," is the premier holiday event of the Palm Beaches. The 1.7 acres of the Ann Norton Sculpture Gardens will transform into a winter wonderland featuring more than 25 professionally decorated trees. The festivities commence with the annual Gala Evening in the Gardens on December 4 featuring music, dance, theatrical performances, and amazing food, followed by Community Days and an evening of mini-merriment, special performances, music, and surprises at the Children's Gala on December 13. Opening Gala tickets are \$250 for nonmembers, \$200 for members, and Children's Gala tickets are \$40.

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