



VASSAR

# MEXICO TODAY

**An Exploration through  
Material, Expressive, and Culinary Cultures**

**Mexico City • Puebla • Oaxaca**

**January 12–21, 2026**



*We are delighted to be your faculty hosts for a January 2026 Vassar Travel Program “Mexico Today: An Exploration through Material, Expressive, and Culinary Cultures.” We are Colleen Ballerino Cohen, Professor and Chair of Anthropology, and Leslie Offutt, Associate Professor Emerita of Latin American History, and we have drawn on our deep familiarity with Mexican history and culture to design an itinerary that explores the cultural wealth, diversity, and vibrancy of contemporary Mexico.*

Our tour begins in the modern heart of Mexico, the beautiful capital Mexico City, where we will visit the renowned Frida Kahlo Museum, the Ministry of Education to view the murals of Diego Rivera, the Zocalo, the city's colonial core. Attendance at an evening performance of the Ballet Folklórico and a wonderful food tour of San Juan Market round out our activities in CDMX. We next travel to the beautiful colonial city of Puebla de los Ángeles, which is nestled at the base of the twin volcanoes Popocatepetl and Iztaccíhuatl. In Puebla, we indulge in the wonderfully rich moles for which the city is famous, learn about the development of the decorative art style known as Indian Baroque, and visit a Talavera tile factory, the other product for which Puebla is famed. Leaving Puebla, we make our way to Oaxaca, stopping along the way to visit an internationally renowned ceramicist in his charming home/studio in the village of Yanhuitlán. After a lunch of homemade tamales, we continue on to Oaxaca de Juárez, capital of the most ethnically and linguistically diverse state in Mexico.



Using Oaxaca as our home base, we travel into the surrounding countryside, where we meet with local artists and artisans, visit workshops that produce traditional textiles and intricately carved wooden items (alebrijes), and enjoy guided tours of the archaeological sites of Monte Albán and Mitla. Of course there will be food—not only a tour of Oaxaca’s central market, a chocolate mill, and a mezcal distillery, but a cooking class with a renowned chef. You might even be tempted to try the regional specialty—chapulines!

We have extensive experience leading Vassar Travel Program tours. Leslie has accompanied alums on tours to Cuba, Mexico, Chile and Argentina, and Lisbon and Madeira, and Colleen has accompanied Vassar Travel Program tours to Cuba, Oaxaca, the Yucatán, and Iceland. We have also worked together on many occasions leading student study trips to Cuba and Mexico. In spring 2018, we led 30 students on a two-week trip through Mérida, Mexico City, Puebla, and Oaxaca, looking at the expressive, material, and culinary cultures of central and southern Mexico. In January 2020, we led 15 alums on a trip very similar to this one. We have made use of these experiences to design this unique opportunity for you to gain historical and ethnographic insights into the cultures and people of the places we visit.

# Student Participants

The four students who will be participating in the Mexico Today trip were selected from a large group of students who applied for a Fall Semester intensive, in which readings, films, and projects will focus on the areas and topics covered during our travels in Mexico. The formal application asked students to detail how the intensive and trip articulate with and advance their academic experiences and interests. Follow-up interviews with all applicants focused on their application responses as well as on what they saw themselves bringing to the intensive and to the trip.

## Kamila Barrios

Hi! My name is Kamila and I'm a rising senior from Douglas, Arizona. I am a math major, with correlates in computer science and Hispanic studies. I am first-gen in the U.S. and, while in college I've pursued interests like the Oviedo Project where I am working on translating part of *Historia General y Natural de las Indias* by Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo. I am also the treasurer for ColorStack, an organization for minorities in computer science, and am an active member of the Latinx Student Union! In my free time, I enjoy reading (currently *Los Peligros de Fumar en la Cama* by Mariana Enriquez) and cooking with friends. I am very excited to meet you all and explore Mexico together!

## Sierra Iames

Hello! My name is Sierra Iames, Class of 2027! I am majoring in cultural anthropology and will soon declare a correlate in international politics. I hope to apply my study and research in these subjects to the field of human rights and social justice. I am the president of the Student Music Union and have provided opportunities for students to perform all around campus, put on and headline their own shows, and even collaborate with other organizations. I am particularly grateful for this opportunity to participate in the trip to Mexico with Vassar alums. I help fund my Vassar education using savings from years of working multiple jobs simultaneously since I turned 16. I am a Questbridge Scholarship recipient as a low-income student, and try to get the most out of—while also bringing the most to—everything Vassar has to offer. This will be the first time traveling out of the country and to Mexico—where my family is from!

## Tyler Briceño

Hello, my name is Tyler Briceño. I am the class of 2028, and besides majoring in anthropology, I am an avid weightlifter, runner, swimmer, kickboxer, and Army ROTC cadet. I also love music; my main instrument, which I have played since fifth grade, is the tuba, but I also play guitar, banjo, harmonica, euphonium, trumpet, and a few percussion instruments. I love listening to folk music and I am in the Vassar traditional music band. I also love to draw (mostly horror). After I graduate, I will commission as an officer in the Army and I hope to become a civil affairs officer.

## Diego Martinez-Hahn

Hey everyone! I am Diego Martinez-Hahn, a junior from Los Angeles. While I love all four fields of anthropology, I am most interested in the archaeology of Mesoamerica and California. Outside of anthropology, I spend my time hiking, practicing judo, and improving my comic book illustration skills. Vassar is a wonderful place for all three of those activities because they have excellent trails on the Preserve, an extracurricular judo class, and so many wonderful places to sit down and draw. I grew up visiting my family in Mexico and I look forward to meeting Vassar alums there.



Aztec Calendar Stone

# Itinerary

**Monday, January 12**

## Arrival in Mexico City

Fly independently to Mexico City's International Airport (MEX), where you will be met by the tour operator. Take a group transfer to your hotel, the luxurious four-star Hotel Zócalo Central, offering an ideal location in the colonial heart of Mexico City. Gather for an orientation stroll in the vicinity of the hotel, including a stop to see Mexico City's astonishing zócalo, the very heart of Mexico City's historic center and the surrounding colonial architecture, including its majestic cathedral and the exposed ruins of the Templo Mayor, one of the main temples of the Aztecs' capital city. Relax over a welcome dinner together of delicious Mexican cuisine at an outstanding restaurant overlooking the zócalo.

*Hotel Zócalo Central (Included meals: Dinner)*

**Tuesday, January 13**

## Vibrant Cultural Expressions

Drive to Coyoacán, one of Mexico City's most delightful neighborhoods. Visit Frida Kahlo's Blue House, a historic house and art museum dedicated to the life and work of Kahlo, which today remains as it was in the 1950s. Following a visit to the Coyoacán market, sample delicious food in a popular local restaurant. Enjoy a guided tour of the Anahuacalli Museum, a thoroughly unique and most impressive building designed by Diego Rivera to house his collection of pre-Hispanic art. Stop at the UNAM campus (National Autonomous University of Mexico) to admire incredible murals that decorate many of the campus buildings, including Juan O'Gorman's iconic mosaic on the Central Library. Attend an afternoon lecture by Professors Offutt and Cohen. The evening is at leisure.

*Hotel Zócalo Central (Included meals: Breakfast, Lunch)*

**Wednesday, January 14**

## Local Cuisine & Gastronomic Culture

Set out to the bustling San Juan food market and sample an array of local foods including tostadas, homemade mole, blue-corn tlacoyos, Mexican cheeses, as well as flavored waters and pulque, during a special tour arranged by Eat Mexico whose on-the-ground team carefully plans food tours that emphasize "the deliciousness of the food; the richness of Mexican food history and gastronomic culture; and the vendors who prepare the food." Return to the historic center to view Diego Rivera's famous murals in the Ministry of Education building. Following free time for dinner, attend the riveting Ballet Folklórico performed in the Palace of Fine Arts, a phenomenal Art Deco building with an amazing stained glass theater curtain designed by Tiffany.

*Hotel Zócalo Central (Included meals: Breakfast, Lunch)*



Zócalo with Mexico City Metropolitan Cathedral in background  
(photo by Adam Jones)



Palace of Fine Arts, Mexico City (photo by James Dennes)

**Thursday, January 15**

## **Puebla: Talavera Pottery & Popular Arts**

Check out of your hotel and drive to Puebla, arguably Mexico's most elegant colonial city. Take a short detour to the incomparable Santa María Tonanzintla church elaborately decorated from floor to ceiling with fabulous gilded and colorful woodcarvings of faces, cherubs, saints, and foliage—an unforgettable sight that embodies the Indian Baroque style. At a Talavera workshop, learn about Talavera production during a special demonstration of the process. After lunch, see the remarkable tiled kitchen of the 18th-century Santa Rosa Convent that now houses the Museum of Popular Arts' excellent collection of handicrafts typical to the state of Puebla. Check into the five-star Casona de los Sapos Hotel Boutique, housed in a beautifully restored 18th-century palace. At dinner, sample moles at one of Puebla's best restaurants.

***Casona de los Sapos Hotel Boutique (Included meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner)***

**Friday, January 16**

## **Puebla's Treasures**

Following a morning lecture by Professor Offutt, stroll through Puebla's historic center, stopping at the Biblioteca Palafoxiana, one of the world's finest historic libraries, and the Casa del Dean to see its intriguing murals. Next visit the Capilla de Rosário, which has been called the "Eighth Wonder of the World" because of its ornate and colorful gold gilded ornamentation. Following lunch at one of the city's most popular restaurants, walk through Puebla's renowned university area. Conclude your day at the Barrio de Artistas, an iconic artists' zone of Puebla with numerous spaces for artists to work and exhibit. Enjoy free time to shop for souvenirs. The evening is at leisure.

***Casona de los Sapos Hotel Boutique (Included meals: Breakfast, Lunch)***

**Saturday, January 17**

## **Scenic Mountain Drive to Oaxaca**

On the drive to Oaxaca admire magnificent scenery. Meet a renowned local potter in the village of Yanhuitlán followed by a home-cooked lunch. Upon arrival in Oaxaca, check into your lovely hotel, the luxury five-star Fiesta Americana. Sip on cocktails during an afternoon lecture by Professor Cohen. Then dine together in a delightful patio restaurant.

***Fiesta Americana (Included meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner)***

**Sunday, January 18**

## **Monte Albán & Oaxacan Woodcarvers**

Spend the morning at awe-inspiring Monte Albán, the ancient Zapotec capital. This archaeological site features a ceremonial plaza as well as a ball court, observatory, various tombs, and several temples. Continue to San Antonio Arrazola, home of the internationally famous Oaxacan



Talavera Shop, Puebla (photo by Katie Bordner)



Monte Albán (photo by Matthew Essman)

woodcarvers. Meet a family of carvers in their home studio and examine the whimsical and imaginative styles produced by various craftspeople in the area. Oaxaqueños have carved masks and toys for hundreds of years, but recently their magical carvings have captured the imaginations of collectors from all over the world. Following lunch, visit San Bartolo Coyotepec, and see the production of Oaxaca's famous black clay pottery. The evening is at leisure.

*Fiesta Americana (Included meals: Breakfast, Lunch)*

**Monday, January 19**

## Mitla & Zapotec Weaving

Drive into the Oaxacan Valley to the palatial ruins of the Mitla archaeological site that features impressive stone mosaics. Original Mitla designs are incorporated into the patterns of distinctive textiles displayed in the textile market near the site. Continue to Teotitlán del Valle, a major Zapotec weaving village famous for its traditional weaving techniques and use of natural dyes. Meet one of the village's most prominent families of weavers and, after being treated to a home-hosted lunch, learn the process of hand dyeing wool with natural dyes and weaving on treadle looms. At a mezcal distillery, taste samples and learn about mezcal production.

*Fiesta Americana (Included meals: Breakfast, Lunch)*

**Tuesday, January 20**

## Oaxaca's Craft & Cuisine

During a morning walking tour, see the exuberant interior of the Santo Domingo church, described by Aldous Huxley as "one of the most extravagantly gorgeous churches in the world." Stroll through the zócalo, the main plaza and heart of the colonial city, and visit Oaxaca's colorful city market, filled with mountains of flowers, handwoven textiles, mounds of freshly ground Oaxacan chocolate, breads formed in every shape imaginable, and clusters of fresh produce. Taste Oaxaca's world-famous hot chocolate during a visit to one of the city's chocolate mills. Enjoy a free afternoon for sightseeing, shopping, or packing. Reconvene in the late afternoon for a fun-filled hands-on cooking class that will teach you the ins and outs of Mexican cooking and then bid *adiós* to Mexico while dining on the dishes prepared together.

*Fiesta Americana (Included meals: Breakfast, Dinner)*

**Wednesday, January 21**

## Adiós México

Transfer to Oaxaca's international airport (OAX) for return flights to the United States.

*(Included meals: Breakfast)*



Weaver in Oaxaca (photo by Christopher Holden)



Mexican Flavors (photo by Bernadette Wurzinger)

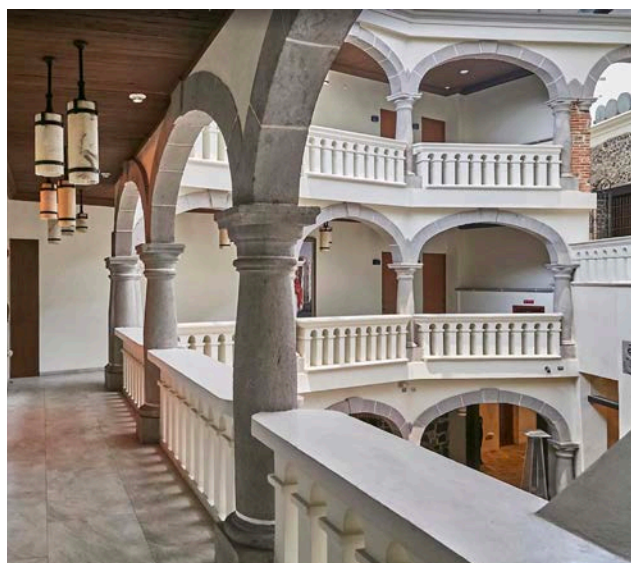
# Hotel Accommodations



## **HOTEL ZÓCALO CENTRAL**

### **Mexico City**

The Hotel Zócalo Central is an architectural jewel, boasting a privileged location in the heart of Mexico City's historic center. The hotel is strategically located just across from the zócalo, the Metropolitan Cathedral, and the National Palace, as well as near a great number of historical and cultural treasures such as the Palace of Fine Arts and the National Museum of Art. Enjoy the incredible view on the terrace overlooking the zócalo, and relax in well-appointed rooms with high ceilings, contemporary design, and luxurious amenities. Complimentary non-alcoholic drinks and snacks are available each day long in the hotel's Café Central.



## **CASONA DE LOS SAÑOS HOTEL BOUTIQUE**

### **Puebla**

This picturesque five-star hotel is one of Mexico's finest new luxury properties, housed in a grandiose 18th-century palace with a stunning interior courtyard, beautiful indoor swimming pool, and lovely rooftop terrace. The hotel is just a couple of blocks away from the zócalo and surrounded by beautiful architecture, lovely shops and good restaurants. With only 19 total rooms, the hotel offers us an intimate home for our two nights in Puebla, as we will be practically the only guests there! Rooms are spacious and elegantly outfitted and include minibars, luxury toiletries, high speed internet, and access to the hotel's fitness center and sauna.



## **GRAND FIESTA AMERICANA**

### **Oaxaca**

Opened in 2019, the luxurious five-star Grand Fiesta Americana Oaxaca sits in the city's center on a lovely family-friendly park, easily walkable from all the main attractions. The hotel seamlessly blends tradition and modernity while staying true to Oaxacan style and design principles. Designed as an urban getaway, the hotel embraces the nature of the colonial city with an array of indoor gardens and green patios providing ample natural light throughout the building. The large central courtyard is an homage to the nearby Jardín Etnobotánico. As a relatively new hotel, the guestrooms are spacious and feature extra comforts. The property offers a fine spa facility and its restaurant and bar are great places to spend an evening.