

Mexico's eco-friendly Huatulco a serene, green tropical treasure

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THE DESTINATION

Located in the foothills of the Sierra Madre de Sur Mountains on the southern Pacific Coast of Mexico, 300 miles southeast of Acapulco, Huatulco is a tranquil vacation paradise. It's one of Mexico's gems – a quaint, quiet, unspoiled destination that has not been overdeveloped or commercialized.

The scenery is stunning. Surrounded by lush vegetation, Huatulco features 35 kilometres of golden beaches and nine beautiful bays. The turquoise water is warm, clean, and clear, the average daily temperature is 28° C, and the sun shines 330 days a year. The people are friendly and helpful, and are very eager to share Huatulco with you.

Huatulco is perfect for families, couples, or groups of friends looking to get away from it all. It has a very authentic Mexican feel to it, and it is very compact and easy to get around. The two main towns are connected to one another: Santa Cruz, where the marina and cruise pier are located, and La Crucecita, the larger of the two centres.

Populated areas are carefully blended with green zones to make the area ecologically friendly. In fact, Huatulco has adopted sustainability programs that position it as one of the world's first sustainable tourism developments. It is one of three destinations in the world (and the only one in the Americas) to hold a Green Globe 21 certification. Please visit <http://www.greenglobeint.com/about/history/> for more information on certification.

ATTRACTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

Diving & Snorkeling

Huatulco is home to the largest coral reef off North America's west coast, and is a diving and snorkeling paradise. There are many professional dive shops in the area.

Fishing

Fishing enthusiasts will find abundant tuna, mahi mahi, blue and black striped marlin, sailfish, grouper, snapper, and more.

Rafting & Kayaking

In addition to enjoying a day of rafting or kayaking, you'll have an opportunity to visit out of the way places, experience local Indian cultures, and view the beautiful migratory birds that call this area home during the winter months.

Golf

Huatulco boasts one of the best golf courses in all of Mexico, with 18 holes and incredible views of the Pacific Ocean and the mountains.

Shopping

There are many local arts and crafts markets throughout Huatulco. In La Crucecita, you'll find silver, the famous Oaxaca black pottery, art, clothing and leather. Prices are very reasonable. Wandering and leisurely exploring is a lot of fun and very safe. The local residents are friendly and the merchants and vendors are not aggressive.

Day Tours

- ***Magic Falls*** – Surround yourself with tropical flora and fauna as you head through the Sierra Madre Mountains. Experience a unique encounter with numerous birds and reptiles. Jump into the crystal clear waters of the Magic Falls and bask in the exotic surroundings.
- ***Paradise Found Bay*** – Cruise along the Bahias De Huatulco coastline, where you'll visit virgin beaches and bays and experience the coral reefs and crystal waters. The first stop is a wonderful bay, where you'll have plenty of time for snorkeling. Then, head to another bay to enjoy a seafood lunch and relax on the beach. You may even be lucky enough to spot turtles, dolphins, and whales!
- ***Outback Safari*** – Experience an ecological adventure! Board open-air all-terrain vehicles and drive into the depths of the forest. Here you'll discover the semi-tropical jungle and the villages in the Mexican outback. At Piedra de Moros, you'll have the chance to watch the ladies make tortillas – and try a sample. As you leave the forest and journey to the coast, you'll cross lagoons and mangroves and stop to taste seasonal fruits before heading to the fishing village of San Augustin.
- ***Huatulco Adventures*** – Explore one of the best snorkeling sites in the area with the opportunity to swim among beautiful coral formations. The tour includes a stop at a papaya plantation, complete with samples. (As this is a sustainable program, you have a chance to name your own papaya tree; your donation ensures the papaya plantation is there for future generations.) Next, you'll head to the Copolita River where your raft awaits. You can enjoy many types of birds in this area as well as the rich flora and fauna. Just before lunch, experience a mucky mud bath! The mud is known as “lodo” and is famous for its medicinal healing powers.
- ***Huatulco Rough Guide*** – Enjoy amazing views of the coastline, including La Bocana, where the mouth of the Copolita River mixes with the salt water of the sea. Tour La Crucecita's town square, including a visit to the local church, which boasts the largest painting of the Virgin de Guadalupe. Sample traditional mescal, stroll through the plaza, and browse the local markets.
- ***Crocs & Turtles*** – Head north to La Ventanilla Lagoon. Here you can see the crocs in their natural habitat, along with iguanas and birds. Site of the Mexican

Turtle Centre, Mazunte is home to every species of marine turtle on the Mexican coast. Here you'll also learn about The Body Shop; founder Anita Roddick created a natural cosmetics project in the area to help ex-turtle hunters take advantage of ecotourism and provide income to local families without harming the turtles. Next, visit the world famous Zipolite Beach and end your journey in Puerto Angel, a small fishing village where you'll sample the catch of the day.

- **Coffee Mountain** – Explore Pluma Hidalgo's colourful market before heading to Finca Cafetalera, an active coffee plantation where you'll learn the secrets of the organic coffee process and enjoy a tasty lunch.

ACCOMMODATION

There's something in Huatulco to fit everyone's preference and budget – from clean basic 2-star hotels in the centre of the village to 5-star beachfront resorts with luxurious spas. In addition to five all-inclusive properties, most of which are located on the beautiful beaches of Tangolunda Bay, there are beach resorts to suit every taste. The friendly and quaint Castillo Huatulco is a great choice for those on a budget, and Barceló Huatulco is the perfect option for families, because of its great restaurants and abundant activities. For nature lovers, the Las Brisas is a must. This resort is set among 50 acres of forest and guests will be delighted to find an abundance of birds, lizards, and small animals. For a luxurious romantic getaway, the 5-star Dreams Huatulco will not disappoint.

DINING

Although most resorts are all-inclusive and include many dining choices, it is wonderful to experience the local cuisine. There are many tasty options at the small family-run restaurants in LaCrucecita and Santa Cruz.

GETTING AROUND

Huatulco covers only a small area, so it's very easy to explore and has a friendly, small-town feel. Taxis are readily available; it costs approximately \$3 U.S. to get from your hotel to the central areas of La Crucecita and Santa Cruz. There are typically pre-set fares to travel to and from the airport, or to the outlying areas and sights. These are posted in hotel lobbies or on the streets next to the taxi depots for convenience.

GETTING THERE

Signature Vacations is currently the only Canadian supplier to offer all-inclusive packages to Huatuclo (November through April). They have one direct flight per week from Calgary, Vancouver, and Toronto; flying time from Calgary to Huatulco is

approximately 5 ½ hours. Mexicana flies more frequently from Calgary with a connection in Mexico City.

TRAVEL TIPS

- Calgary Co-op Travel highly recommends the use of a passport when travelling to Mexico.
- The purchase of emergency medical insurance is also highly recommended.
- The local currency is the peso, but U.S. and Canadian dollars are widely accepted. When shopping in stores or markets you are more likely to receive a better price if items are purchased in pesos. Currency exchange is available at all resorts.
- The rainy/hurricane season runs from approximately June through October.
- Mexico is a great place to shop for leather goods, silver, coffee, tequila, and vanilla. Huatulco is known for silver, black pottery and mezcal (a special type of tequila).
- Guests flying on charter airlines will need to be at the airport a minimum of three hours prior to departure.
- The local airport is very small with only a few shops. Wait times in the customs area can be long.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Want to go green and serene when you fly south for the winter? Huatulco is the natural choice! Get all the eco-friendly details from Jeanine (403-299-5414; email hamptonstravel@calgarycoop.com) or Joanne (403-216-4500; email crowfoottravel@calgarycoop.com). Or visit any Calgary Co-op Travel office; dial our call centre (403-299-4144) after hours; or book online 24/7 via www.calgarycoop.com.