

NOVEMBER 2025 • MEET CHEF BEGOÑA RODRIGO: VALENCIA'S VEGGIE QUEEN • FINDING FORTUNE IN LAID-BACK YUCATÁN • 24 HOURS IN LIMA • GUIDE TO BOLOGNA • YOUR FREE COPY TO TAKE HOME

HOLLAND HERALD



*"Cooking with vegetables
is always exciting"*

TOP CHEF BEGOÑA RODRIGO


KLM
Travel Well



November 2025

IN THIS ISSUE

8

Through Your Lens
A penguin in Antarctica
by Bob van Beers

13

The Selection
The latest & greatest reasons to go exploring
14 - To See
16 - To Do
18 - To Meet
19 - To Taste
20 - To Wish For

22

Earth's Ambassador Freek Vonk
Dr Vonk talks about his close encounter with a family of grizzly bears in Canada

23

Bon Appétit
Try this tantalising Tascalate Sour cocktail at Tlecán in Mexico City

24

Local Insider
Creative in the worlds of tech, fashion and food, Stefano Andreis gives his tips for Bologna

26

Game Changer
A look into the inspiring world of top veggie chef Begoña Rodrigo in Spain

36

24 Hours
Your day & evening guide to the hottest places in Lima

38

Around The Globe
An adventure in lesser-known Yucatán, where surprises await

48

Coffee Break
We interview Thérèse Boer, owner of the prestigious De Librije restaurant

52

Happy Places
Some of the best restaurants with Michelin Green Stars

60

On Your Radar
KLM & airline industry information, personal stories and entertainment
61 - KLM News
64 - Travel Well
66 - Fleet
68 - Travellers
71 - Flying Blue
72 - Now on Board
75 - SkyTeam
76 - House Rules
79 - Maps
86 - Amsterdam Map
88 - Airport Maps
89 - Out of The Blue

90

Your Next Destination
Building the case for a journey to Gothenburg

Contributors

MEET THE TEAM



Anouk De Kleermacker

A portrait, business and interiors photographer, Anouk is inspired by people and has a special love for interiors. During photoshoots, she stays open for pleasant surprises, such as a sudden facial expression, shadow or movement. She's also an artist, and she sells limited fine-art prints. Anouk took the photos for the article on Perfect Serve (p. 64), the company that produces KLM's Business Class meals. **Anouk's travel tip:** "For 10 or 11 days each June, Copenhagen Photo Festival transforms Denmark's capital into a photographer's paradise, with exhibitions, talks, performances and events."



Jurriaan Teulings

Documenting 20 years of world travel with words and photos, Jurriaan's contributions to KLM alone exceed 1,000 printed pages. Since his first commission for us in 2005, he's travelled from the backwaters of Kerala to the moonlit glaciers of Antarctica on assignment for *Holland Herald*. Jurriaan wrote, and took photos for, the travel story on Yucatán, Mexico (p. 38). **Jurriaan's travel tip:** "If, like mine, your mind craves perfection but defaults to chaos, invest in duplicate toiletries, chargers, etc. that never need unpacking. Happiness is a suitcase that only needs a change of clothes."



Charlotte Latten

Charlotte is a journalist and the Content Manager of KLM's *Flying Dutchman* magazine. For this issue, she interviewed top vegetable chef Begoña Rodrigo at her Michelin-starred restaurant in Spain for the Game Changer article (p. 26). **Charlotte's travel tip:** "I visited Slovenia this year and it was a real discovery. It's relatively small, but has a very varied landscape. You'll find amazing snow-capped mountains and glacial lakes, as well as caves, rolling hills and coastline. The food and culture change from place to place too. I really enjoyed travelling through Slovenia."

Colophon

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PEACEFUL PENINSULA

In the Mexican state of Yucatán, a success story has shifted from rope to recipes and recreation. New menus celebrate Mayan heritage, and the once unforgiving jungle is now a luxury retreat.

Text and photography Jurriaan Teulings



Yucatán
Mexico



Doña Eliza, a stout Mayan sage with striking honey-coloured eyes folds my hands around the soft, thick leaves she's just picked from an oregano plant. "Breathe in, breathe out. I'll take you into the bees' energy," she says, catching me wondering what I've gotten myself into. We're standing in the forest outside Maní, a *pueblo mágico* ('magical village') in the heart of the Yucatán Peninsula, where Mayan culture, so often reduced to crumbling pyramids of a lost civilisation, is very much alive. Eliza reaches for a furiously smoking bowl of *copal* – a resinous incense made from tree sap – on a table behind her and begins my spiritual cleansing, murmuring Mayan incantations as we vanish into a fragrant white cloud. Next, it's time to slide my hand inside a nest of bees. I'm reminded of that scene in the film *Dune*, where the protagonist must put his hand into a box of pain.

How did we get here? A few days ago, I arrived in Mérida, a city of pastel-coloured buildings and orderly streets on Yucatán Peninsula's northwestern tip. As the capital of a state with the highest percentage of indigenous inhabitants, this is arguably the largest Mayan city today. And yet, along its wide, tree-lined Paseo de Montejo boulevard, it feels closer to a tropical Paris. Flanked by government buildings and the mansions of wealthy plantation owners who once modelled it on the Champs-Élysées, Paseo de Montejo is replete with ornate iron fences, limestone colonnades and belle époque facades.

It's a mystery to me how this wonderful, safe city draws so few visitors compared to Cancún and the Riviera Maya, the glossy belt of beach resorts south of it, on the Caribbean side of the peninsula. But the lack of mass tourism made my surprise encounter with Dutch cheese all the more jarring. Wandering around the La Ermita neighbourhood, I stumbled upon a food festival devoted to Edam in the church square. Known locally as *queso de bola* ('ball cheese'), it crowns prawn skewers, is spooned over corn tortillas with shredded turkey, and grated onto *marquesitas*, those crispy cheese

crepes with optional marmalade and... wait, is that Nutella? With Edam? I'm all for culinary appropriation, but this felt like retaliation. A local must have witnessed an injustice done to tacos in the Netherlands.

In a lively cantina down the street, I ended up sharing a table with Pascual Madura, a bricklayer and passionate storyteller. Over a sweating bottle of local Montejo beer, he leant in. "You know why we love Edam?" he said, completely straight-faced. "Once upon a time, a Dutch pirate ship went down in a storm off the coast. When the wax-covered cheese balls floated ashore, the Mayans tried them, liked them and have been eating them ever since." I nodded, unsure whether to laugh or take notes. The local legend didn't strike me as particularly watertight, but then again, Edam does float.

"Pirates?" scoffed Don Raúl Casares when I put this to him the next evening. "No, no; Edam was just used as ballast on merchant ships returning from Europe." We were at Mansión Mérida, a hulking belle époque meringue of a building presiding over Hidalgo Square. Once Casares' family residence, it later served as the social club for the local elite before he turned it into an opulent hotel. The courtyard restaurant is anchored by a neoclassical fountain with scalloped basins and a cherub on top, framed by trailing palms. Inside are antiques, marble floors, a grand staircase and chandeliers that would have made Liberace weep. "As you can see, the hacienda owners had a nose for European luxury goods," said Casares with a grin.

Money for old rope

As a scion of a prominent Yucatecan family of merchants and cultural patrons, he should know. Around 1900, when Cancún was little more than a mosquito-infested sandbar, Mérida ranked among the wealthiest cities in the Americas, and reportedly had more millionaires per capita than any other. Rail corridors radiated in all directions, linking some 1,200 plantations where fibre from henequen – an »

Previous pages

Ya'axche Centro Etnogastronómico restaurant in Halachó (left), Mérida Cathedral (right)

Right page, top (from left to right)

La Ermita Cantina in Mérida; Pyramid of the Magician in the ancient Mayan city of Uxmal; Melipona bees

Bottom

Brightly painted colonial buildings overlook colourful zebra crossings in Mérida city centre



**NEXT, IT'S TIME TO SLIDE MY
HAND INSIDE A NEST OF BEES**

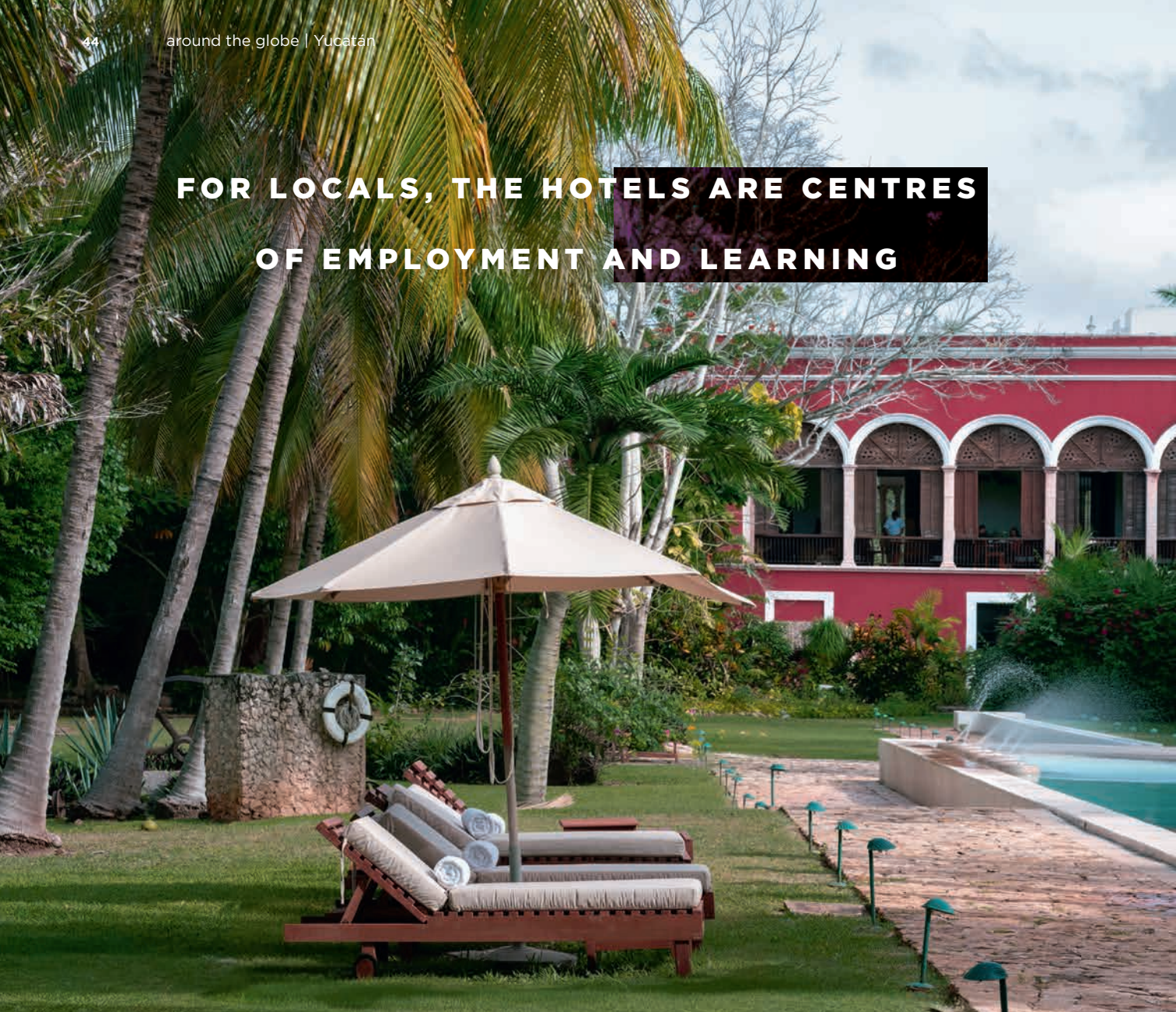


MÉRIDA IS ARGUABLY THE LARGEST
MAYAN CITY TODAY. AND YET, IT FEELS
CLOSER TO A TROPICAL PARIS



Above Horse and carriage at Convent of Saint Anthony of Padua in Izamal
Left page Mansión Mérida Hotel Boutique

FOR LOCALS, THE HOTELS ARE CENTRES OF EMPLOYMENT AND LEARNING



Left page, top
Hacienda Temozón Sur

Bottom (from left to right) Chef Wilson Alonzo showcases a *piib* (earth oven) at Ya'axche restaurant's outdoor kitchen in Halachó; La Bicuruta, Merida's car-free Sunday on Paseo de Montejo; lunch at Ya'axche

aggressively spiky local agave – was processed into rope and twine, then shipped from Sisal, the port that lent the product its name.

Today, sisal has been demoted to carpets and cat-scratchers, but before nylon triggered the mid-20th-century collapse of the henequen economy, it was the spine of empire. Vital to the agriculture, shipping and manufacturing that fuelled the Industrial Age, sisal earned the handful of families in control of the trade the kind of generation wealth that makes one crave exotic cheese and proclaim, “Let’s copy that Champs-Élysées.” And so concludes Casares: “That’s how we ended up with a cuisine that’s more of a fusion than anywhere else in Mexico.” Case in point: *queso relleno*. This Yucatecan dish is a hollowed-out Edam sphere filled with minced pork mixed with olives, capers and raisins.

Leaving Mérida, I entered a hungry jungle, the kind that swallows cities and pyramids whole. Like most visitors, I was drawn to the sections archaeologists had surgically removed from its belly: temples and ceremonial plazas of lesser-visited sites such as Ek’ Balam and Uxmal. Further inland, the line between Mayan heritage and daily life blurs in cities such as Izamal. This yellow-washed gem is set between four pyramids, one buried beneath a monastery, and buzzes with markets, horse-drawn carriages and restaurants. But first, the dense foliage that crowds the narrow road offers a glimpse of other sorts of ruins: vine-choked shells of sisal factories abandoned since the 1930s.

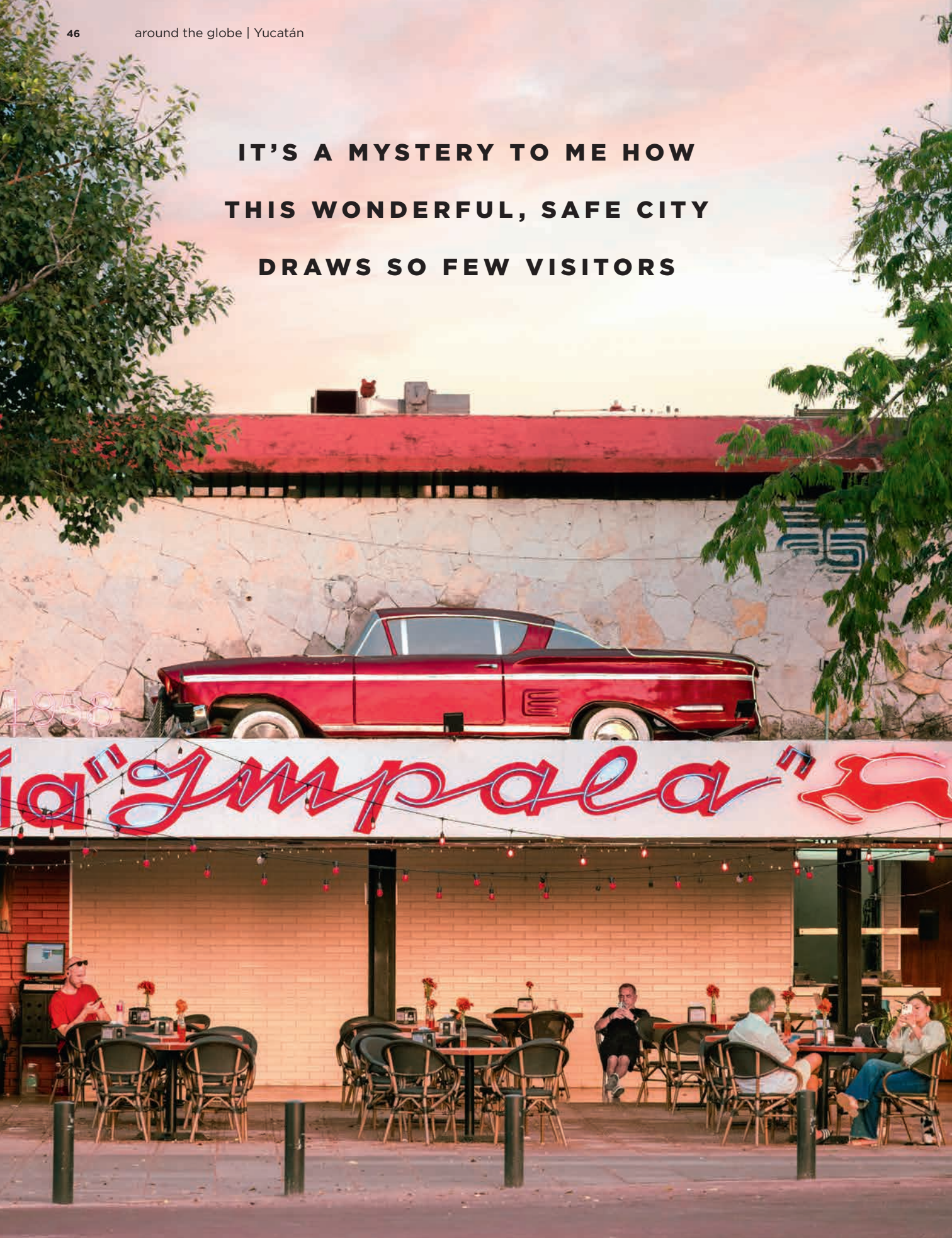
Welcome to the...

“This jungle is relentless,” said Herman Reeling Brouwer as we explored the ruin of an engine room, looking like a steampunk film set, where a rusted henequen scraper stood. “Today, this is all forest, but a century ago, you’d only have found henequen plantations here.” Reeling Brouwer is General Manager of Haciendas of Yucatán, a collection of five former plantations converted into luxury hotels in the early 2000s by banker Roberto Hernández Ramírez. Reservoirs became swimming pools, machine rooms

became restaurants and offices became plush suites. Hacienda Temozón Sur, a 17th-century plantation house full of antiques and surrounded by gardens, is the showpiece. It has hosted celebrities and statesmen, including two US presidents. Here, a cenote (sinkhole exposing an underground pool of water) has been converted into a fabulous spa. “But this is not a hotel project,” insisted Reeling Brouwer. “Ramírez’ goal was not to become as rich as a hotelier, but to make the haciendas self-sufficient. If there were to be profits, they would be reinvested or used to hire more staff. This is primarily a social venture to protect some of the last repositories of living Mayan culture.”

For guests, the haciendas offer a living counterpoint to the archaeological sites, where Mayan is spoken, recipes and cooking techniques link directly to the past, and millennia-old agricultural and spiritual traditions have survived colonial contact. The milpa system – where corn grows with beans, squash and other native crops – remains in use and has gained scientific interest for sustaining soil fertility, controlling pests naturally and maintaining biodiversity more effectively than many modern monocultures. For locals, the hotels are centres of employment and learning. “My dream is that in 5 to 10 years, positions like mine will be filled entirely by people from these communities, because it is their right,” said Reeling Brouwer. “Their forefathers were trapped and horribly exploited in a de facto feudal system run by plantation owners.” A growing sense of pride in Mayan traditions is evident at chef Wilson Alonzo’s Ya’axche Centro Etnogastronómico restaurant. Alonzo previously worked at the Temozón Sur and San José Haciendas. In a clearing beside his family’s milpa near Halachó, he served an impressive lunch without electricity or even a roof, from a kitchen centred on a wood-fired hearth and a *piib*, the traditional earth oven used to slow-cook food in clay pots. His aim is to preserve traditions largely absent from modern kitchens, and present them with the refinement he first encountered »

IT'S A MYSTERY TO ME HOW
THIS WONDERFUL, SAFE CITY
DRAWS SO FEW VISITORS



Left page
Cafetería Impala
on Paseo de
Montejo in Mérida

working at the kitchens of the hacienda hotels. “It’s actually quite simple,” he said, pointing to the smoking pit, the wood-and-seed necklace over his chef’s jacket giving him an air of Mayan clergy. “How long you bury the food depends on the size: chicken for an hour and a half, and up to 24 hours for a whole pig.” Everything is made to order, and from scratch. At a wooden table under a palapa, we’re served *sikil p’aak*, a creamy pumpkin-seed and tomato dip, and *codorniz*, quail grilled over the wood fire. We’re given a drink made from honey, basil and lime to wash it down with. The three haciendas where I stayed are largely run by local staff, including *sabadores* – traditional healers – in the spas. They make ideal bases for visiting the less-crowded Mayan sites and nature reserves on the west side of the peninsula: Uxmal, with its intricate stone mosaics and images of the rain god Chac; and the mangrove forests of Celestún that are home to a huge flamingo colony. Hacienda San José is not just the starting point for Izamal and a visit to the ‘private’ Cenote Xocempich, but is also an oasis of tranquillity. Rarely have I slept so well, a comfort I attribute to the sacred ceiba tree incorporated into the design of my room.

Speaking of sacred things, my newfound energy isn’t just from restorative sleep. Let’s go back to where this story began: the bee ceremony in Maní. You wouldn’t think that sticking one’s hand into a live beehive would be a soothing experience, but these are sacred Melipona bees; peaceful, stingless creatures that seem to be in no hurry to make war with intruders. A mass soon covers my hand, abuzz with a thousand wings, meticulously inspecting every knuckle, cuticle and pore. “They’re removing the negative energy and adding positive energy,” explains Doña Eliza. Judging by my sudden appetite, it’s working. I could make short work of a pig from the *píib* and still have the guts for that Edam and Nutella encore. «

Jurriaan Teulings was invited on his trip to Yucatán by Sapa Pana Travel, a Dutch specialist in Latin American destinations. sapapanatravel.nl



JURRIAAN TEULINGS IS A WIDELY PUBLISHED TRAVEL WRITER AND PHOTOGRAPHER. HERE ARE HIS TIPS FOR THE MEXICAN STATE OF YUCATÁN.

To eat

Milpa mix

Kinich serves impressive food. Try the *poc chuc*: pork fillet marinated in sour orange, pepper and regional spices. Its earth oven is large enough to fit a whole deer. Too much? Kanché, its stylish bar, offers creative cocktails, and small dishes, made from ingredients grown in its own garden. restaurantekinich.com (Spanish website)

To stay

Oasis

If a stay at a hacienda hotel is a bit too remote for your taste, but you still require the tranquillity of hummingbirds around a lily pond, Casa de Madera, a stylish private villa a few blocks from the Convent of Saint Anthony of Padua in Izamal, is for you. catherwood.mx

To do

Taller Maya

Modern design meets traditional skills in this beautiful shop in Mérida that showcases the living heritage of Mayan craftsmanship, including clothing, jewellery, textiles,

ceramics and homeware, all made using sustainable materials and ancestral methods. tallermaya.org (Spanish website)

Electric pink

The estuary of the Ria Celestún Biosphere Reserve hosts the brightest flamingo colony I’ve seen. Its mangroves shelter another 303 bird species, making it a haven for keen birdwatchers. When the heat rises, cool off in the spring-fed lagoon; provided the resident crocodile isn’t about (trust your guide).

Ecos de Uxmal

Uxmal’s most famous structure is said to have been built overnight by a magical dwarf, which made me wonder what happens here after dark. While most visit in daylight, several nights a week the site hosts Ecos de Uxmal, a light and sound show that brings the Mayan structures to life through projections, sound and narration. cocolab.mx

Mother Nature’s womb

Hacienda Temozón Sur has a fine pool, but nothing tops its private cenote. A 2.5km bike ride along an old decauville

track leads to a quiet, slightly eerie, hole in the ground. A metal staircase leads to the bottom of this limestone cathedral studded with fossilised shells. Small fish flicker past in perfectly still, crystal-clear water. It feels like the womb of Mother Earth. lhg.com

Tree of life

At Maní’s Principal Square, don’t miss the great ceiba, the Mayan tree of life, connecting the underworld, earth and sky. Ceibas are a source of mysticism throughout the state of Yucatán, and this one is painted with a depiction of the Xtabay, the woman of Mayan legend who lures men to their doom.

Book this story

KLM operates three nonstop flights per week to Cancún Intl Airport from Amsterdam Airport Schiphol.

Book your flight on klm.com