

Mexico - December, 2015

by Larry and Pavla Luckham



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First stop, back to our favorite beach at Los Arcifes in Tulum.

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This is really a restaurant on the beach. We have been here enough, and the same guy runs the place, so he knows us. And he is quite happy to have us spend all day there, read books and go in and out of the water.



Their mixed ceviche is pretty good and the portion was enormous.

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One of Pavla's favorite places at our favorite hotel in Tulum, Don Diego de La Selva.



Our next stop was at Laguna Bacalar where we again stayed at hotel Villas Ecotucan.

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The lake is clean fresh water, very swimmable, kayakable, and now SUP'able.



Larry finds a friend.

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We borrowed a couple of the kayaks and went for a paddle. It turned out that these kayaks are not rotomolded and not very rugged. They leaked and took on water so weren't very fun to paddle.



Pavla coming back from an early morning paddle in the fog. The shore was alive with birds while the water was mystical in the morning mist.

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Good paddle!



Now for a swim.



Chetumal is a commercial and industrial town on the border with Belize, but they have space reserved for Larry, the Crocodile.



The Hotel Bacalar is in town, right on the lake, and very nice. We went for lunch and Pavla went for a swim, a very long swim. We will stay there next time.

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Laguna Bacalar is called Lake of Seven Colors, and it is easy to see why.



Pavla swam to the island ahead, which took a while. Larry was already trying to figure out how to get all the luggage back home all by himself in case that she got eaten by a pirate or a fish.

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We ordered cold beer and some food at Hotel Bacalar, and they let us use the facilities for as long as we cared to stay. Our cabana at Ecotucan was in a jungle, hot and surrounded by mosquitoes so we gladly spent the afternoon on a breezy hillside above the lake.



Zocalo Bacalar. It's across from an old fort. We came back after dinner for a Christmas program. This is the town where Caesar, the sushi chef, has bought land to build a house.

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Zocalo Bacalar. It's across from an old fort. We came back after dinner for a Christmas program.



Fuerte de San Felipe, an old fort in Bacalar built to protect the town from pirates. The lake was once connected to the sea. It sort of still is, but not in a way that allows pirate ships into the lake.

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View of Laguna Bacalar from the fort.



We stayed at the Eco Hotel for a couple of nights so we were able to try out a couple of dinner places. This was La Playita. Just below the fort and on the water.

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That's Pavla taking a walk on the pier. I went after dinner.



Dinner at La Playita. The food wasn't memorable, but the patio on the lake shaded by a huge tree was very pleasant.

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The shrimp and rice was pretty good.



The second night it was this great little pizza place just off the zocalo. The energetic owner, her husband and their daughters run the place.

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Getting ready for the Christmas show.



On with the show!



Chetumal is only a short distance from Bacalar so a day trip was in order.



In the Chetumal Walmart we came across this. Firefighter turnouts! Not sure who they imagine will use them.



A visit to the ruins at Becan.



Becan was cool, with lots of passage ways and climbing up and down stairs and structures. There were no other visitors there, and we could have had a tranquil experience, just us, the jungle and the pyramids. Except for the guy with the leaf blower that insisted on moving the jungle droppings from one corner to the other.

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As fantastic as European ruins are, and there are some great ones in Italy & Greece, what the Mayans did takes a backseat to no one.



Pavla on top.

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And, all by hand over hundreds of years.



Then there was the Chicanna ruins just a little bit further down the road.



Chicanna is known for extensive decorations representing the mouth of a serpent. It was very hot and humid and we kept looking for sighting of a toucan that never happened. The ruins were small, but very impressive, and it was a quiet day in the jungle.



The symbolism and complexity is stunning.

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Campeche! A long and tiring drive from Bacalar. We hoped for a scenic road through Seybaplaya and ended up facing enormous sink holes, demonstration with a barricade, unmarked turns. Bad driving day.



Happy to be in Campeche! The colorful signs are another attempt by the government to attract tourists.

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We stayed in the same Hotel Plaza Colonial that we stumbled upon on the first trip. Pavla booked a junior suite, because it was only extra \$5, and she has never stayed in one before. It turned out to be a room big enough to dance in, with a french door facing a stone wall. The opposite of charming or cozy.



The malecon in Campeche. Walking the malecon is one of our favorite Campeche pastimes.

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Larry on the zocalo.



A peaceful, laid back center of a town. We spent hours just doing nothing there. This year there were a number of large modern sculpture pieces on display.

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Christmas decorations, on a windy day.



Fishing pangas in various states of upkeep or decay as we walked down the malecon. The fisherman have taken camper tops from pickups to make cabins on their pangas.

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La Palapa del Tio Fito. We stopped for lunch and beers.



Pavla got talking to a young woman who was going to be the god mother of little baby Isabela. They were setting up for la fiesta to celebrate her baptizing, and Pavla was invited to meet the baby and her mother. A Mayan woman was holding the baby who took immediate exception to be being passed on to anybody else and started crying.

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Colorful.



More colorful. And as plain as the streetscape is, except for the nice colors, behind many of these walls are beautiful courtyards and gardens.



Colorful street, with sidewalks wide enough to walk on, and this curb is only inches from the street. Not always the case!



One of the nice streets closed off to vehicle traffic.



You've got to love Mexico. When the streets slope down for drainage, no point in sidewalks following. Just add steps! Note the lady in dark clothes at the end of the block where the curb is about 4 feet high and 5 steps.



El mercado municipal. Large and full of everything from produce, to fish, poultry and meat, plus all manner of household goods.

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You find all sorts of things in the market. Those poor guys were probably by-catch



Pile of catfish that a guy was cleaning and cutting into filets.

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Los pulpos! Pavla said something to the lady selling them and she picked one up on a spatula for closer examination. Bid smile!



The crabs were still running around, trying to look fierce

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The outskirts of the market. Once inside, there is no sunlight, you are on a different planet. Last year we encountered a guy with a whole butchered hog on his shoulder, and a cigarette in one hand, on his way in.



Larry is reading a book on the zocalo.



One of several weddings in the main cathedral.



Las Posadas, a traditional reenactment of part of the Christmas story where the expecting couple is trying to find a roof over their heads. We really wanted to see more, but for the longest time nothing was happening and we finally gave up. Operating on Mexican time takes time to learn.

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Pavla noticed a sign offering visits to the church tower. Due to some miscommunication we probably climbed up when we weren't supposed to, but nobody cared and the views were beautiful.



Bring your earplugs !

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Larry in the tower. Just like Stinadla.



Pavla is having a blast. She gets to climb and explore and not get caught.



The stairway up to the tower was spiral and narrow.



A great Cuban band was playing in the zocalo.



This young girl is a daughter of the band leader, and this was her first public performance. She started shy and then just ran with it. Amazing.



Everything is decorated with colored light for Christmas.



We stopped by Edzna on the way from Campeche. This is a nice large scale ruin, and not too many visitors, at least not this time of year.



These "smaller" ruins may not be as famous as Palenque but they are still amazing.





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View from the top of one.



More intricate stone carving. Also, the pattern of smaller stones arranged seemingly in such a way as to provide traction and avoid a slippery surface. Hard on bare feet?

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Ruins native resident! Iguanas are plentiful.



One of the colorful small towns in the middle of Yucatán. We kept going to pharmacies looking for Pavla's allergy medication. The pharmacist would look at what we want, nod knowingly, spend 5 minutes on a computer, and tell us they don't have it. Finally instead of asking for Flonase Pavla just explained her symptoms, and got small bottle of what turned out to be Claritin. One pill and sneezing was gone. Next time, just trust to the professional.



This is the interior of the building on the last page.



Every town has town square, zocalo, with a church.

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And, almost every zocalo is decorated for Christmas.

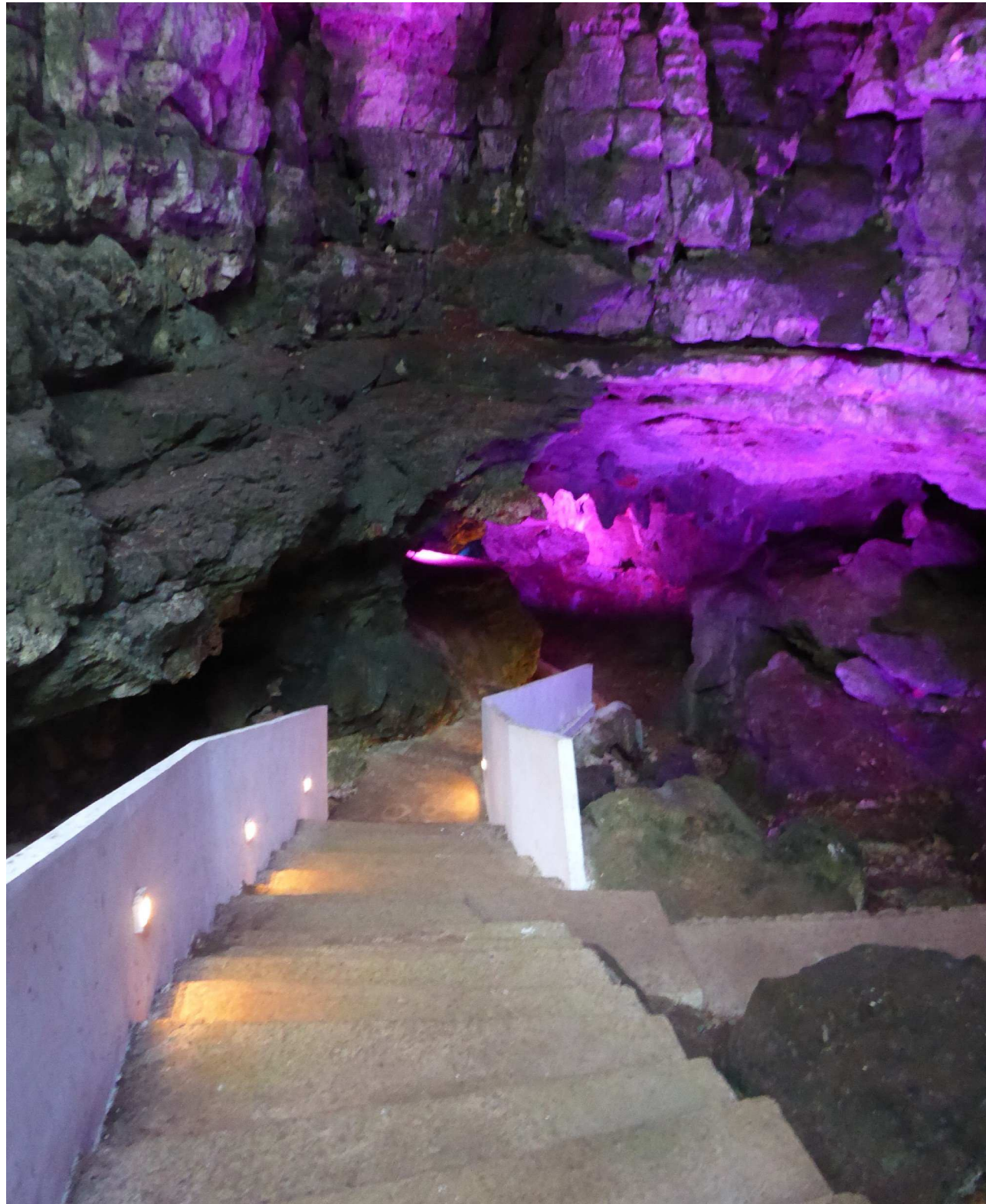


We stopped by a roadside cave attraction.

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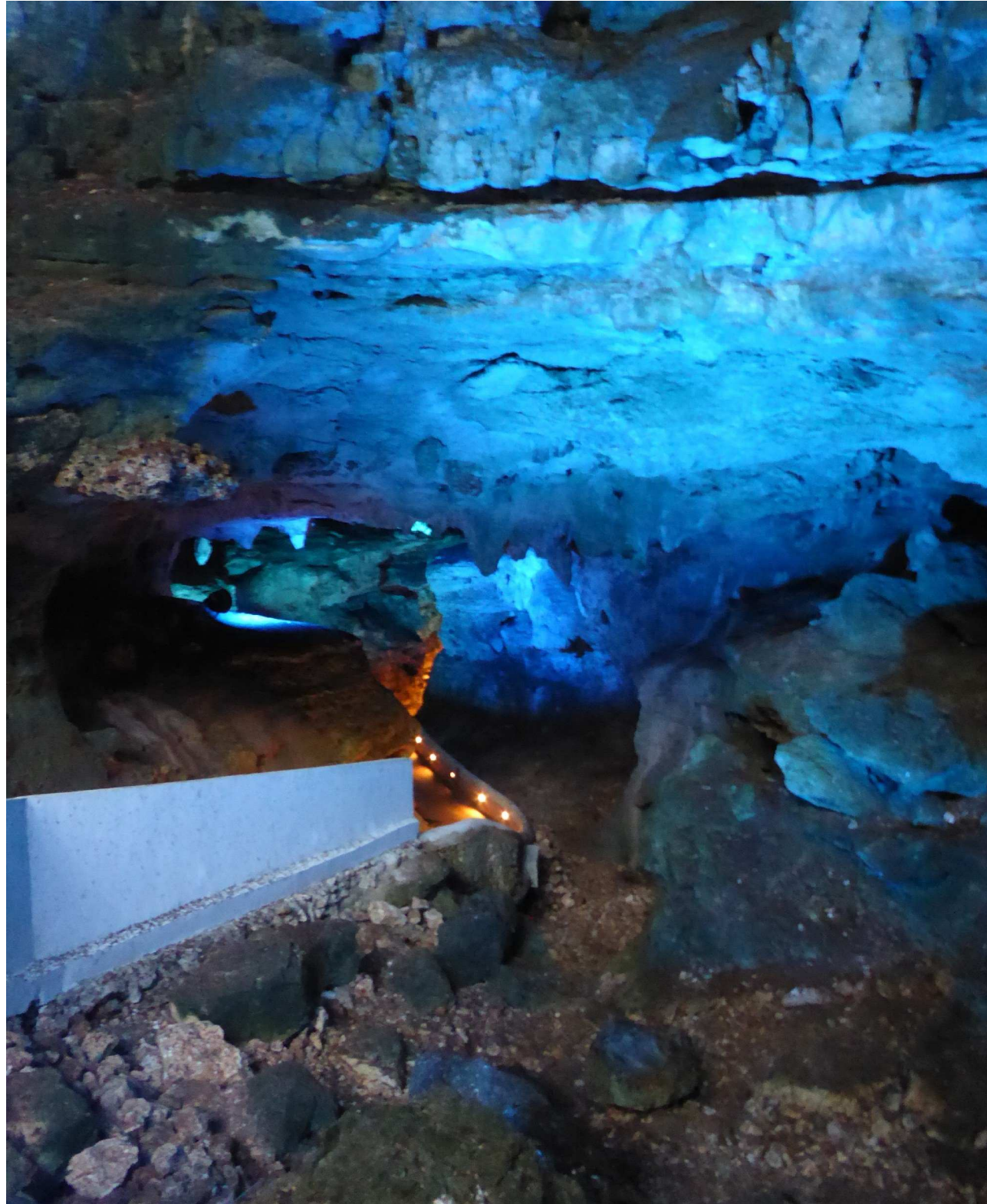


This one was no longer "natural" but it had colorful lighting and music.



The cave wasn't exactly left in its pristine natural state, but considering the number of caves in the area, it is actually OK to turn one into a light and music show.

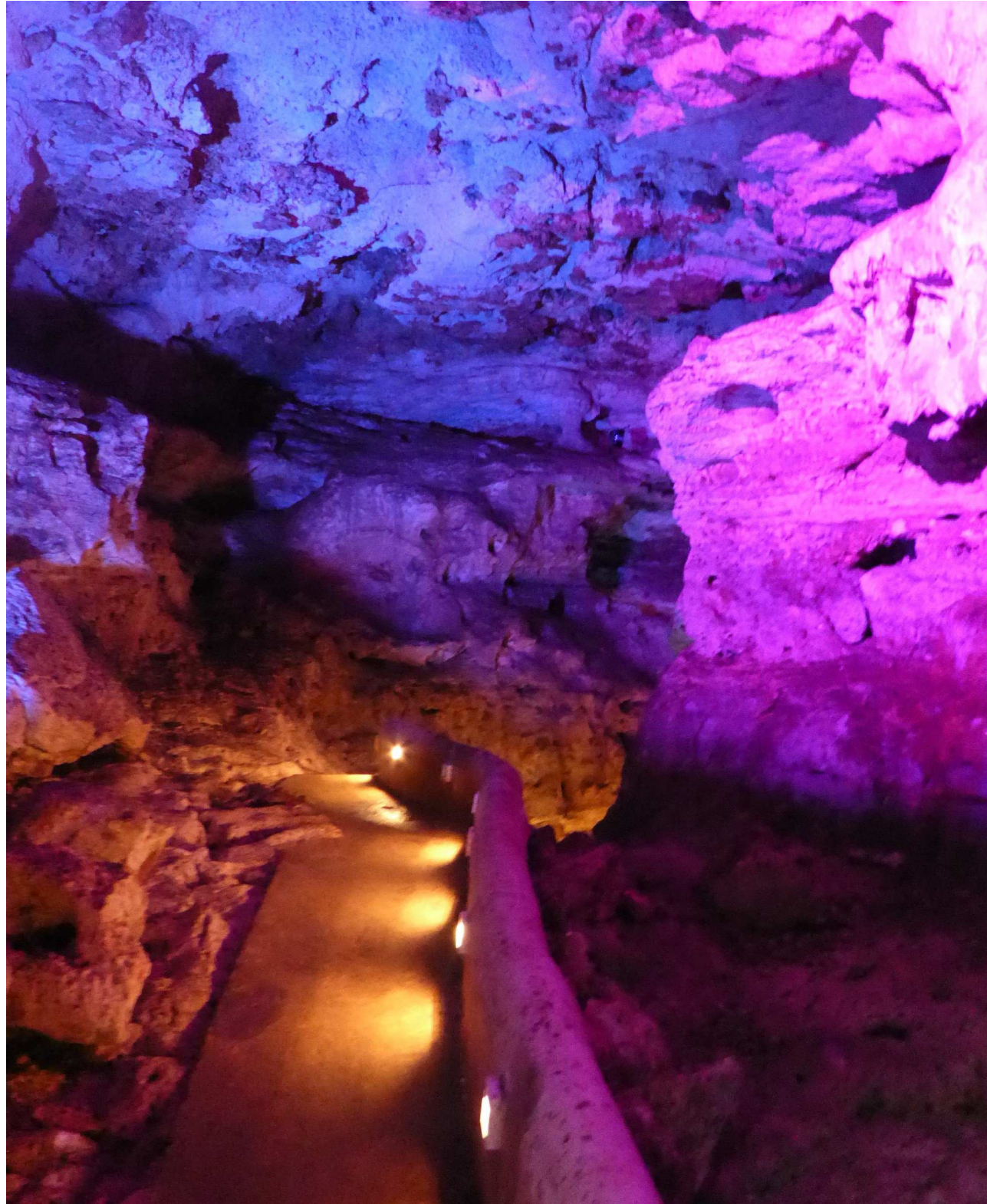
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At one point we took a wrong turn and went off into an area that wasn't really open to the public.



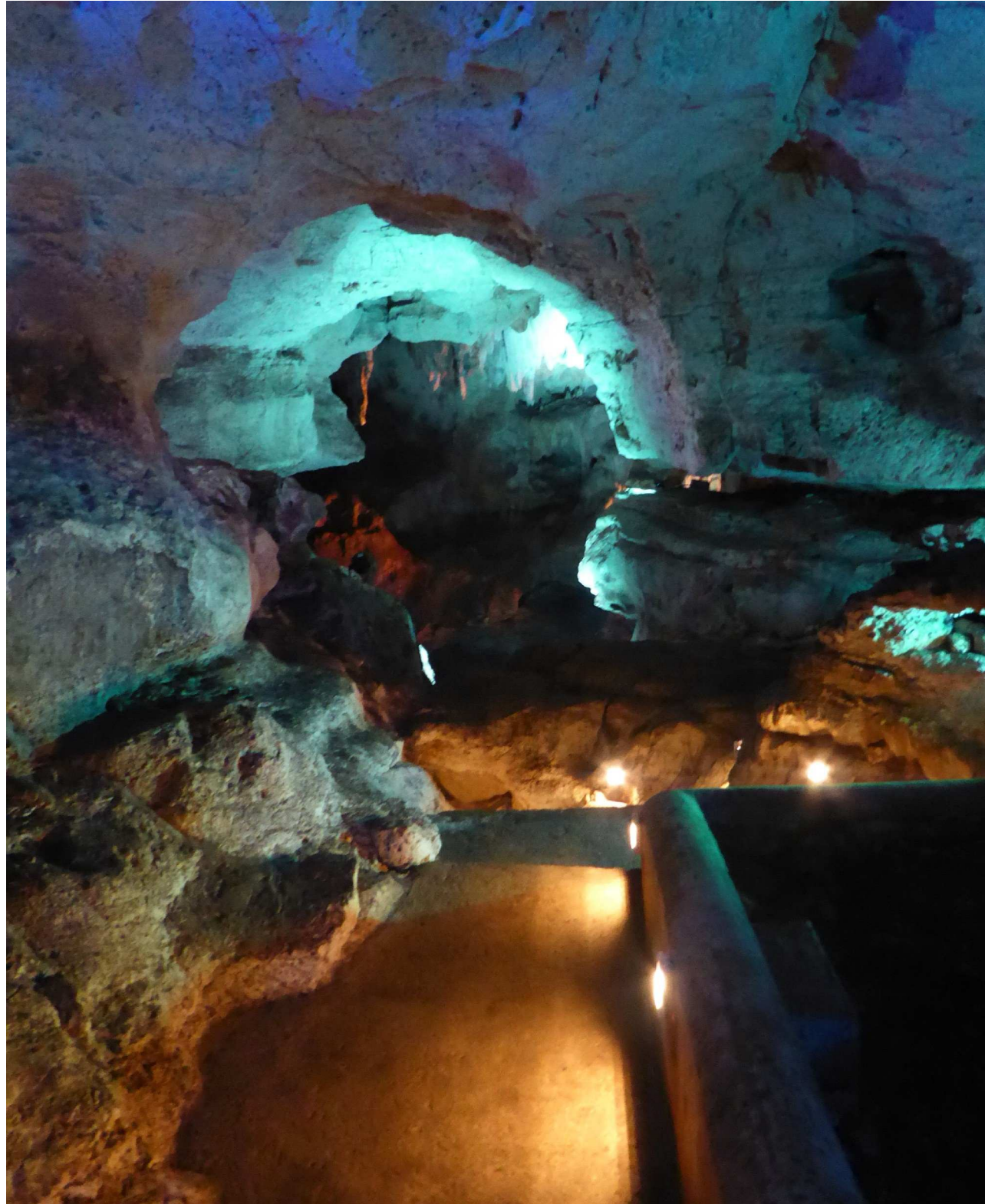
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In this section the light colors were changing.

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I think it was a bit past this that we went right instead of left, and left the trail.



Another little town. Traditional Mayan house on the left, catholic church ahead, and of course the guy in the bed of the pickup truck ahead of us.



Pickled Onion in Santa Elena, in the middle of Yucatán jungle. It turned out that Pavla mixed up dates and reservations, and they expected us the previous night. Fortunately they had one last cabana available and gave it to us. There is nothing like arriving very hot and tired and finding out that there is no room awaiting. We liked it so much that we stayed an extra night.



Our cabana at Pickled Onion.

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Even in December, it was very hot and humid, and the pool was a saving grace.



Our room. Pretty nice.

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Almost, but not quite, another princess bed for Pavla.



The orange thing in the middle, that is a corgi tail. Valerie Pickled, the British owner, had a proper British corgi puppy with endless energy. Larry fell in love immediately.

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The place has beautiful serene landscaping and lots colorful birds.



We spent the day poking around little towns with unpronounceable names and getting lost constantly. This is in Oxxutzcab.

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Another town, another church.



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Not sure if this is a regular street market, or if this was special for Christmas.



The land of pedicabs and motocabs.

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Pretty peaceful.



Oxcutzcab is the center of this citrus growing region.

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Market. Everything looks and is fresh.



Limes! Or maybe oranges.



This market, like many in Mexico, had both an indoor part, and an outdoor part.



Pick up some vegetables, and a houseplant.



We walked over to have a look at the church. Then back to the market.



Turkeys for sale. Very fresh. Still alive. This is Christmas time. Note the bound feet. Making Christmas dinner really starts at the beginning here.



Pavla asked the ladies if she could take a picture of their turkeys in the crate. One of them promptly picked one up and handed it to her. They are heavy! The ladies giggled away.



Labna is a small ruin known for its intricately decorated building, and, most of all, its arch.



El Arco, the arch in Labna.



Each of the Mayan ruins sites, which were small to large cities in Mayan times, seems to have a unique style.



Very ornamental.



Columns and a Mayan arch.



The site of Kabah extended on both sides of the road. The Palace of the Masks is decorated by masks of rain god Chaac, repeated over and over and over. There is an arch on the other side of the road, without ornamentation, but much taller than the one in Labna.



Mayan, but in a different style.



Intricate patterns and carving.



El Arco.



Cenote Kankirische near Abala on the way from Santa Elena to Merida. The cenote was not easy to find with a limited description. We were going down a bad road not sure if we have already missed the turn, should continue, or give up. Finally there was a motorcycle going the other direction, and with little Spanish and lots of good will, we got directions. Another long drive on a dirt road, and we arrived to a clearing in jungle with marked parking spaces and a bored guy collecting fee.



It was just us and a three divers who were smarter and drove all the way to the cenote, not believing the first guy that the closer parking was full. Another bored local was collecting fee there, not sure if competing with the first one or working together.

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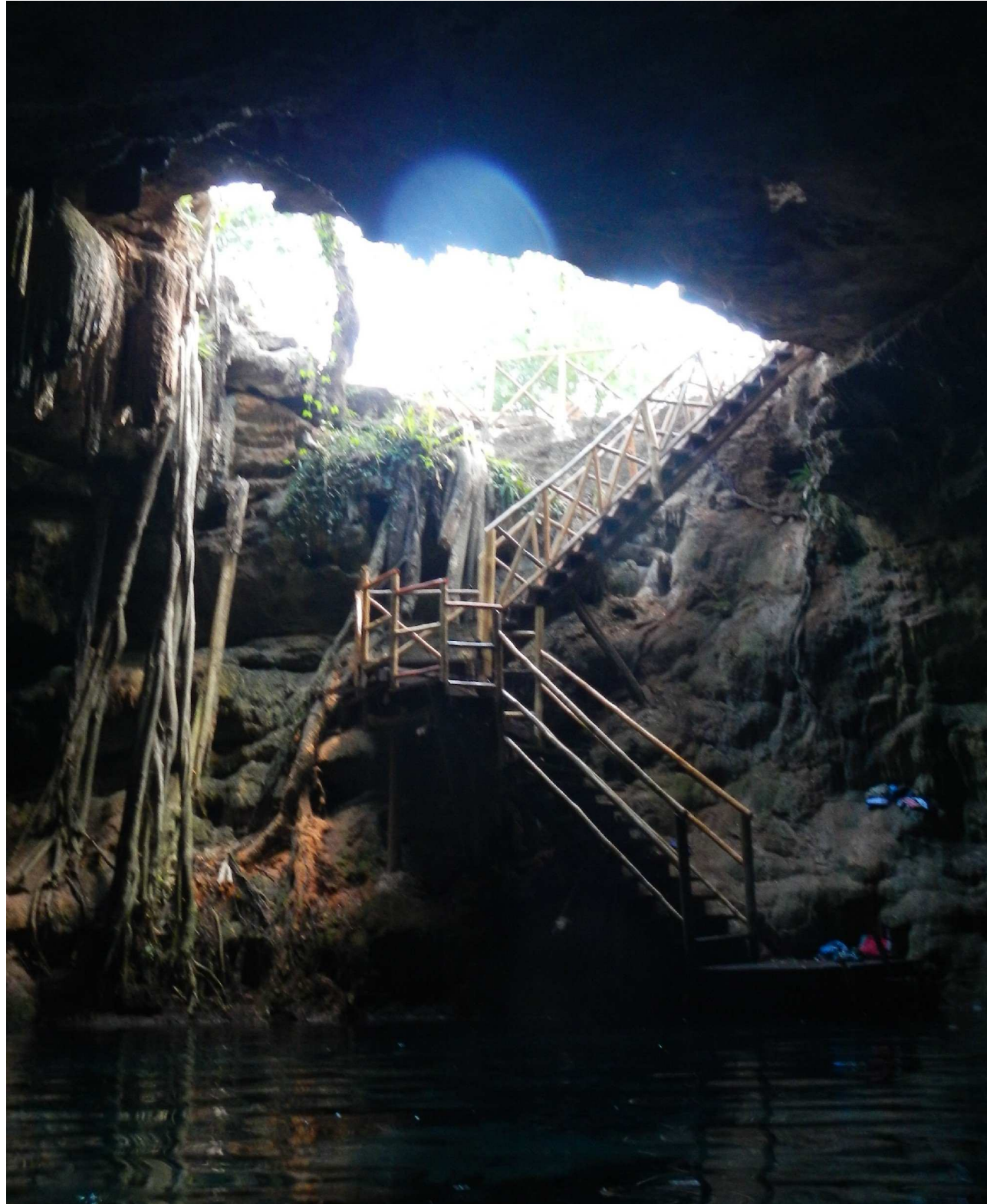


The water was nice and clear and offered some cooling on a hot humid Yucatán day.



Larry rescuing glasses dropped to the bottom.

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The penetrating tree roots add a nice touch of the macabre.



Our hotel in Merida. This was at least our third time here.

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Not much changed, the pool was still there and just as inviting.



Towel art.

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Walk to the zocalo with life size nativity scene very popular with locals.



Fake Mayan structure dividing major street leading to the Mayan museum.

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We walked all the way to the Parque del Centenario one morning, just to find out it was closed that day. It was fairly disappointing on a hot day after a long walk.



The park had a small zoo that we got to see over the fence.

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Nice old Merida building, and for sale.



We spent the afternoon watching life in the zocalo.



Those two Mayan ladies were great. One had a flip flop that was falling apart, so they got a big bottle of glue and fixed it right then and there.



This little guy saw us, two American tourists with cameras, and had to say Hola.



The spray artist. There must be a spray artist on the square in Merida, it is a rule.



Larry enjoying time relaxing in the main square and observing life passing by.

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Parque Santa Lucia near the hotel.



We stopped for dinner on the square one night. It was pretty sitting outside, but the restaurant itself was a little pretentious. Next time we will come for the weekly live music in the park.

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Portico del Peregrino, our favorite restaurant in Merida. The courtyard is muy romantico.



Cathedral in Merida. Built with stones from a Mayan pyramid that used to be where the cathedral is now. Christmas Eve mass.

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Christmas day breakfast at Hotel Casa San Angel.



Christmas day breakfast at Hotel Casa San Angel.

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Hotel Casa San Angel. Very Merida.



It looked very nice, but Pavla priced it at around \$300 a night, about 3 times what we are paying some blocks away.

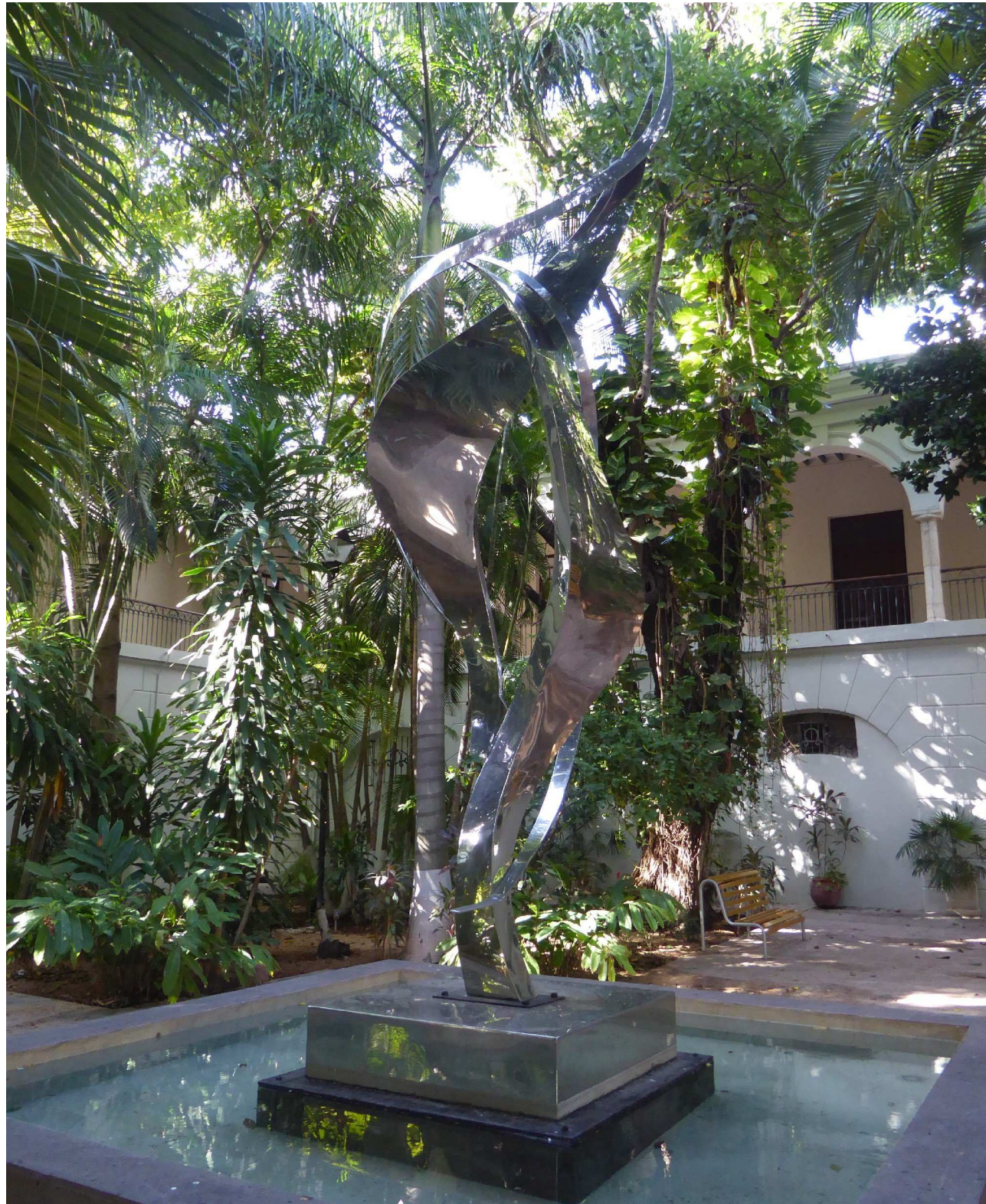
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Covered passage next to the art museum.

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The museum is free and air conditioned. And it has art, too.



We've been here a number of times and are often the only visitors, at least in the section that we are in at the time.

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We've probably been there 3-4 times.



El Gran Museo del Mundo Maya is a bit outside of central Merida. It's ultra modern spectacular architecture.

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These were part of a temporary exhibit, I think, by schools.



They have some really fine collections.

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This modern exhibit was on the top floor of the birdcage tower. The artist had pasted thousands of these little ant stickers on the floors, walls, and just about everything else. He had wonderfully detailed little bug figures in a display case.



Very colorfull.



This was an interesting ship model. I've forgotten the details, but it's a trimaran, of sorts, as there are smaller hulls outside the main one. Notice that it also has a propeller, so not terribly old.

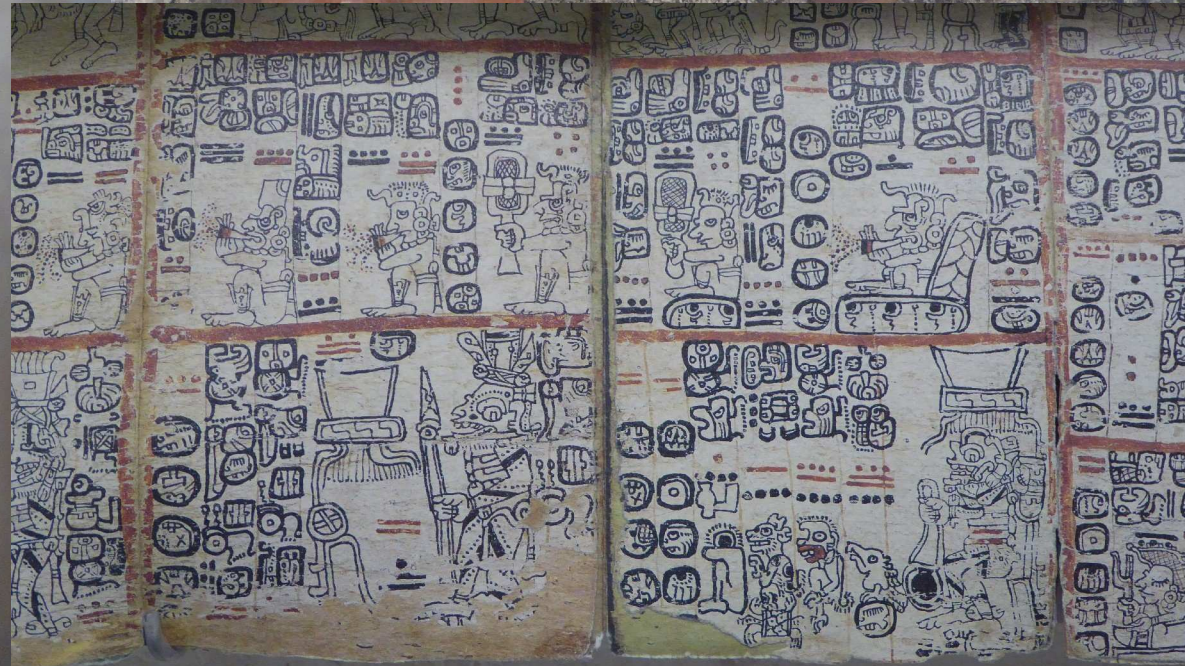


Inside the blue lit dome was a geotechnical exhibit presentation that we didn't see.

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It's hard to tell from the photo but this was a walkable glass floor.





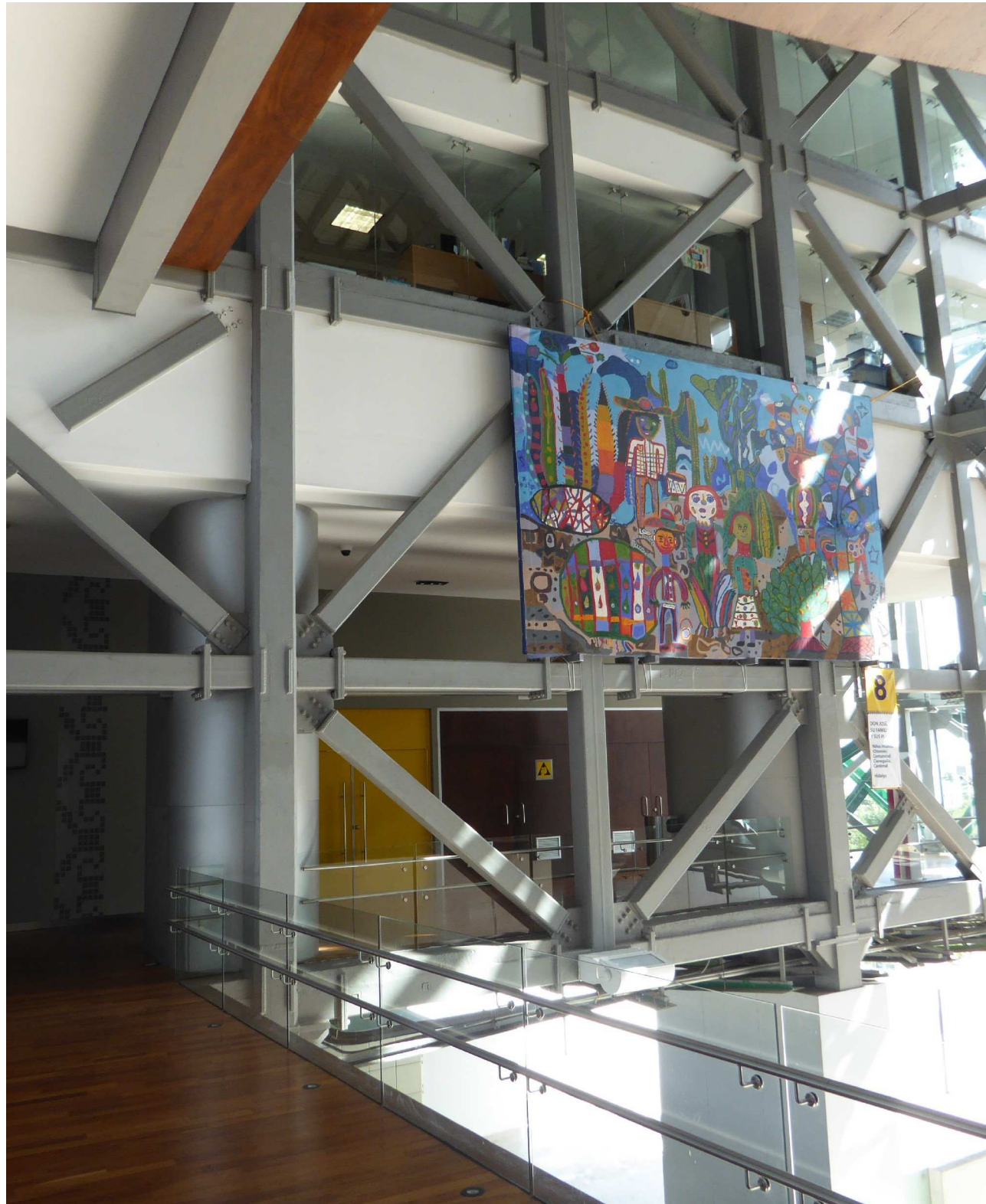
This is a reproduction and enters into a small theater.



Modern along with the ancient.



Winding stair to the birdcage tower.



The birdcage structure was pretty cool.

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It was either 4 or 5 stories tall.



Lots of structure to the structure.

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There was a glass curtain wall enclosing the whole birdcage with special stainless steel mounting hardware.



One day we decided to drive to the little coastal town of Sisal. Small settlement on Highway 28 on the way.

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I think this might be Hunucma, another town on Highway 28 on the way to Sisal.



El Muelle in the little beach town of Sisal, a day trip from Merida.

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Sisal was a pretty quiet place.



We brought the inflatable SUP so Pavla paddles off the playa de Sisal.

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The Muelle de Sisal Restaurante on the beach in Sisal where we had a nice lunch after Pavla paddled on her SUP.



Happy Pavla. Paddled and now lunch!

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We also took a walk on the beach and collected a couple of shells.



Starfish on the beach in Sisal.

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We spent a few more days in Merida before needing to head home. This sculpture was in the back stairwell of our hotel.



Night life on the zocalo, especially at Christmas.

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The nativity has a life size elephant.



Santa consults a customer.



Many Mayan cities have a ball court where games were played. These guys are demonstrating how the game was actually played. Points are scored when the ball goes through the suspended ring.



Too soon vacation is over and we're back at the airport waiting for our flight home.

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Pavla carried this guy all the way from Tulum on about the first or second night in Mexico all the way home.



Pavla bought this big guy at a Christmas fair in Tulum about our first night in Mexico and managed to hand carry it all the way home so it arrived in one piece and hangs in our front entry.



