

Mérida's Paseo de Montejo

One of the best reasons to travel is the opportunity to challenge your poorly-held assumptions and purge yourself of them. A child of the US Midwest, I grew up with the vague concept of "Mexico" as a dry, dusty place where poor people lived simply. This idea was embedded into my subconscious by a lot of factors: mainly, our proudly ignorant American culture, and a media overly reliant on stereotypes. By watching *The Three Amigos* and *Speedy Gonzales*, I learned to identify Mexico as a mud-walled hut with chickens pecking in the dirt.

If someone had taken me, as a child, on a stroll along Mérida's Paseo de Montejo, and then revealed that we were in Mexico, I would have refused to believe it. My brain would have shut down.



The wide, tree-lined Paseo de Montejo is Mexico at its most extravagant. Along either side of the broad boulevard, mansion after mansion fight for prominence, each more ostentatious than the next. Today, they've been converted into museums or banks, but these were once the homes of Mérida's richest families. As we walked down the long, shaded sidewalk, I could hear the bewildered child inside me screaming "You're not in Mexico!"