

Territorial dynamics of cultural tourism in Izamal, Yucatan, Mexico

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Published online: 17 July 2015
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Abstract The aim of this paper is to reveal the organization and territorial dynamics of tourism in Izamal, a town located in the Mayan territory in the southeastern Mexican state of Yucatan. Through the analysis of territorial elements such as touristic resources, support services for tourism, infrastructure, communications nets and visitors flows, the structure integrating the tourist destination will be revealed. Special emphasis will be focused on cultural resources. The results show that tourist attractions in Izamal are associated to its history and culture. Despite the great potential of territorial resources for tourism, Izamal is contesting with other close destinations such as Merida, Valladolid, Chichen Itza and Cancun. The nearness to these sites leaves Izamal as a secondary destination limited to 1-day visits. Regarding the global context, the town can be considered an international destination visited by travellers coming from the five continents. Due to the presence of Our Lady of Izamal, important flows of regional visitors (motivated by faith) arrive to Izamal, especially during religious festivities. Thus, non-regional visitors see the town as a secondary destination but the city also keeps a symbolic significance among regional inhabitants. Tourism dynamics inside the historic town appear as

limited to a few spots inside a small perimeter where most of tourist services are located, provoking the segregation of large districts of the urban space.

Keywords Cultural tourism · Tourism dynamics · Territorial structure of tourism · Mexican magic towns

Introduction

Since the first half of twentieth century Mexico has become a popular tourist destination. Besides its remarkable beach locations (e.g. Acapulco, Los Cabos, Cancun), the Mexican territory is popular among travellers due to its cultural richness, which includes remains of pre-Colombian civilizations (Teotihuacan, Chichen Itzá, Tulum) as well as a large amount of cities exemplars of colonial architecture (Puebla, Oaxaca, Merida). Also, small cities or towns that preserve the rural dynamics and the appearance of a typical “Mexican town” (Taxco, San Cristobal de las Casas, Alamos) have developed an important activity related to tourism.

In a global context, Mexico holds the 10th position in the rank of destinations by international tourist arrivals (WTO 2015). Thus, the country takes advantage of its natural and cultural resources, as well as its geographic location, in order to contend in the international tourism market, which is currently the largest industry worldwide.

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In the cultural tourism market, the Secretariat of Tourism (Spanish abbreviation: *Sectur*) has developed some successful programs as World Heritage Cities, Mayan World and Magic Towns. This last one started in 2001 and currently includes 83 locations along the Mexican territory. The goal of the program is to attract visitors to small communities, which preserve architectural and cultural features making them the apology of rural colonial towns in Mexico. The name Magic Town has proved to be an effective brand in terms of tourism development, meanwhile some critics point out the risk of turning the valorous heritage into a theme park due to the need of attracting visitors (Hernandez Lopez 2009; Clausen Baslev and Velázquez García 2010; Valverde Valverde 2013; Lopez Levi 2013; Rodriguez Chumillas 2013; Mendez Sainz 2014).

Izamal was integrated into the Magic Towns program in 2001, the very first year of the program's implementation. Because of that fact, the location's publicity has adopted the slogan: "Izamal: First Magic Town in Mexico". At the same time, Yucatan -where the town is located- is one of the five states integrating the Mayan World, another of the products developed by *Sectur* in order to promote the cultural resources as tourism attractions in the Mexican territory.

Thus, Izamal is a relevant space for tourism in the Mexican context. Not only is a picturesque village possessing a relevant colonial architecture, but also it is a location which cradles some remains of ancient Mayan culture such as monumental pyramids. Considering these valuable characteristics, Izamal is part of Mexico's Tentative List of properties, which can be proposed for the Unesco World Heritage List (<http://whc.unesco.org/en/tentativelists/5394/>).

Theoretical background

In order to reveal the territorial dynamics of tourism in Izamal, the analysis methodology proposed by the territorial structure of tourism (TST) will be applied to this case. TST approach derives from Regional Geography and its theoretical basis originates in the former URSS geographic school inside the research lines focused on economics regionalization, natural resources' operation and environmental conflicts (Propín Frejomil and Sánchez Crispín 2001).

The TST approach is suitable for analyzing any economic activity. It synthesizes the distinctive features of geographic space, understood as a cognitive image, which can be mapped, and it allows raising, illustrating and interpreting the series of human contradictions inside a country as well as its social interactions in a supranational scale (Propín Frejomil and Sánchez Crispín 2001: 149).

From such perspective, three conditions explain the TST being tourism the economic activity that integrates a particular space. The first condition is the spatial distribution of touristic resources, this defines the space occupation patterns; the second, refers to infrastructure or services net supporting visitors demands; and the third, reviews the flows of goods, persons and information that attract tourism into domestic or foreign destinations (Gallegos Jimenez 2003; Lopez López 2001; Sanchez Crispin et al. 2005).

Studies referring to TST include the concept of reticular space proposed by D. Hiernaux. The exposition is somehow similar to that of TST: it proposes a model of territory configuration integrated by nodes organizing the space and those are communicated through bonding canals, which allow the circulation of flows (Hiernaux 1989).

Thus, TST scrutinizes the physical basis and social organization that allows the growth of tourism. The aim of the analysis is to identify the relation between society, production system and natural environment in order to understand how such interaction modifies the spatial organization of destinations along different time periods.

On the other hand, the Territorial Processes (TP) examine the historic evolution of tourist spaces. According to Kostrowicki (1986), societies' satisfaction of desires and needs originate TP, which include every activity related to human beings subsistence.

Ergo, TS focus on the material spatial dimension while TP reviews the immaterial component. Unlike TS, which are stationary, TP are highly dynamics. TP are relevant since they are human activities in a perpetual change: evolving, expanding, interconnecting and spreading. In a practical sense, TP explain why a tourist destination becomes famous at a certain time interval while some other would decrease and loose popularity (Kostrowicki 1986; Propín Frejomil and Sánchez Crispín 2001).

Both, TS and TP, integrate the Tourism Territorial Organization (TTO)—also valid for any economic activity. The results exposed by this sort of studies reveal the links between tourism and territory in a broad perspective going from local to worldwide exchanges. Also, it's an approach that can be applied in different scales going from single locations, regions to even entire countries.

Regarding the Mexican Magic Towns, in the last decade a few academic researches have taken some of these sites as study objects using either TST or TTO approaches: Alamos (Sanchez Plascencia 2011) San Cristobal de las Casas (Garza Tovar 2009); Taxco (Adan García 2000). In all cases, the results of the analysis have showed a tourist development associated to cultural resources, particularly those located in the historic cores such as old downtowns areas. Also, an uneven distribution of wealth that favors a small group of inhabitants related to tourism services. And the most disappointing is the fact that tourism does not benefit the whole territory but it usually is the cause of spatial segregation.

In a practical sense the results obtained from applying the TTO approach offer a full diagnose about the scene in the tourism activity of a certain location, stating fortitudes and weakness in its current plight. Such balance is useful for transport and infrastructure development, destination planning, product improvements, designing of new attraction, targeting advertising to potential and captive markets, and likewise handling of the environmental, socio-economic, and cultural impacts of tourism in host communities.

Also, by studying the TTO and TST, the territorial dynamics of tourism inside the target space are drawn through the study of the location of tourist attractions and services as well as visitors movements inside the place. Territorial dynamics will expose the areas used as well as those left aside by the tourism system.

Methodology

TTO comprises a mixture of methods and techniques going from bureau research to field work, collecting and analyzing qualitative and quantitative data. Following the model proposed by previous authors—such as the case of Guatemala (Sanchez Crispin et al. 2012), Monterrey (Sanchez Crispin et al. 2012) Los Cabos (Lopez López 2001)—, the first step consists on

describing the physical and social conditions of the studied space (Izamal in this case); at this stage, special emphasis should be given to the distribution of tourist attractions and support services. The second step focuses on the description of nodes and canals, which integrate the nets where tourist flows move around. Fieldwork in situ was essential for identifying those elements, but also important data was found in the tourist guides, brochures and web pages dedicated to Izamal.

The origin of tourists is essential to analyze the relation between the tourist spaces with other nodes in the national or international context. The poll as a primary source was used to get a panorama about Izamal visitors' origin.

In this case, the poll consisted of a questionnaire composed by 20 items regarding: (a) visitors profile; (b) spatial behavior of visitors; (c) perception and valuation of the site; (d) importance of Magic Village brand in the visitors' perception. The poll was conducted in December 2014; a total of 51 interviews were done among visitors. Although it is a small sample, the survey it's not the core of this research; it's just provides supplementary information to the territorial dynamics analyses. Regarding the visitor's flows, the record book of the Cultural and Craft Center, where tourist wrote their provenance, provided useful information.

Mapping the information collected as well as in the fieldwork as in the interviews is a crucial step for visualizing and understanding the spatial dynamics and relations generated by tourism activity. The maps showing Izamal TST where elaborated using the ArcGis 10.1 program.

Geographic, social and historic context of Izamal

Izamal is the main locality of the homonymous municipality, and is located in the Mexican southern state of Yucatan (integrated by 106 municipalities), almost at the center of Yucatan's Peninsula (Fig. 1). The city is 72 km to the east of Merida, the state's capital. The region climate is classified as warm, sub-humid with rainy season during the summer. Its height it's only 13 m above the sea level. The average temperature is 27 °C with peaks around 38 °C (Inegi 2009).

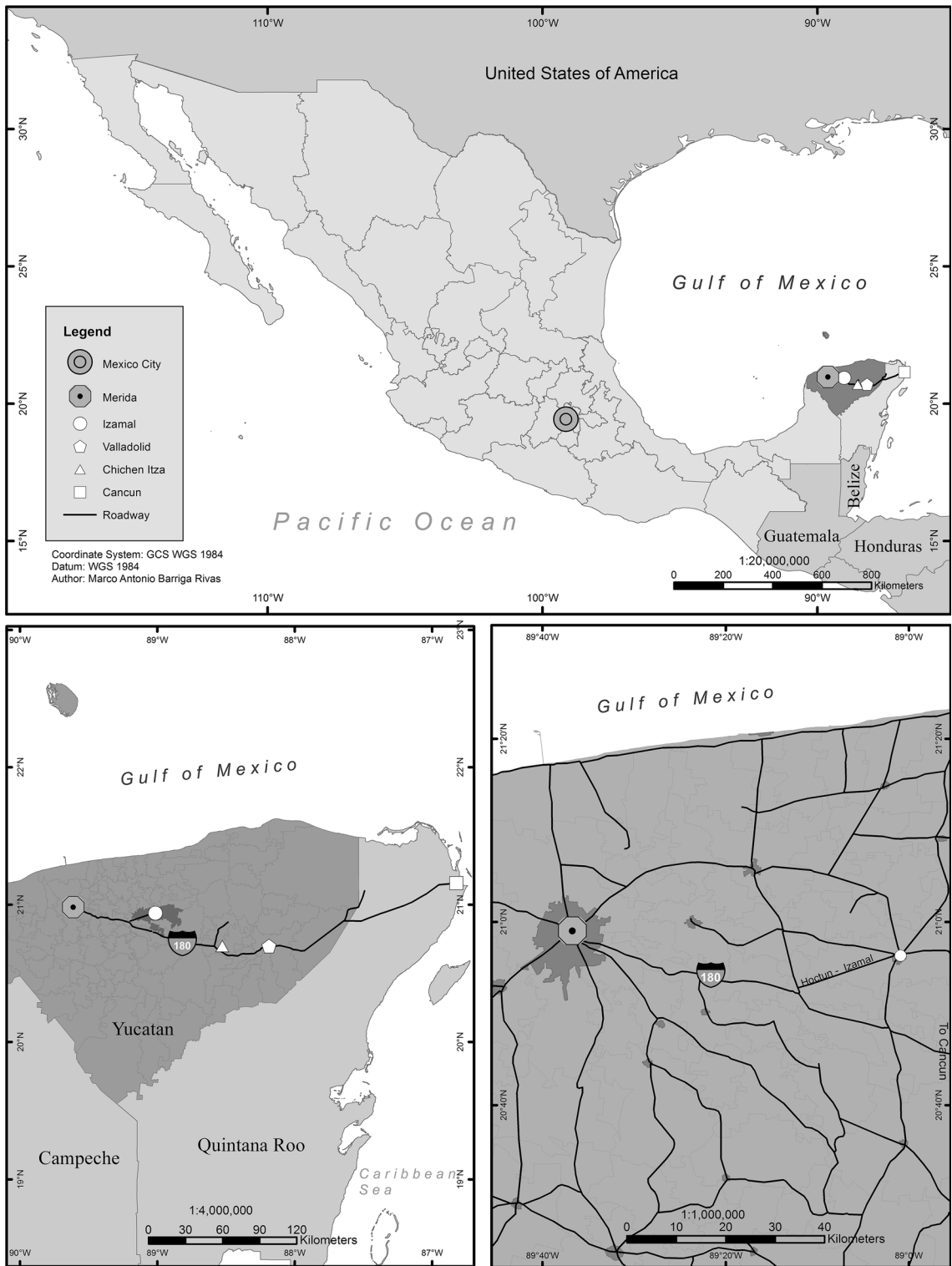


Fig. 1 Location of Izamal

Regarding the orography, the entire municipality relief is basically flat. A barrier with flat rocky soil constitutes it. In this territory there are no surface water streams. However in the subsoil there are underground rivers known as *cenotes*, in some cases the cover of these flows has collapsed creating a pool, which results very attractive for tourists and are characteristic of Yucatan's Peninsula geomorphology.

The municipality includes 18 locations and 25,980 inhabitants, according to 2010 census. The most important location and center of governance is also named Izamal, whose population is around 16,000 persons (Inegi 2010).

Local economy shows a prevalence of secondary and tertiary sectors (38 % each) while primary activities only occupy 23 % of the employed economically active population, which adds up 34 % of Izamal's municipality inhabitants (Inegi 2010).

Around 40 % of Izamal's population speaks an original language, mainly Maya, but there are also a few zapoteco¹ speakers. Due to the population's multiethnic composition as well as its historic background, Izamal is known as "The city of three cultures" referring to Mayan, Spanish and contemporary cultures coexisting in the same space.

The name Izamal derives from the word Itzamana or Zamna, meaning "dew that falls from the sky". In the Mayan tradition Zamna was a legendary god-man, chief and priest who decided to establish a city that should be the main religious center for all the Mayab (Mayan world). Izamal has a more than 2500 years history as a human settlement. Seemingly, the greatest activity took place at the end of Protoclassic period (150 BC–250 AD) and the Early Classic (250–600 AD), according to the construction data of the most relevant buildings and the extensive stone road net. The aforementioned elements reflect Izamal's politic and economic importance in the North of Yucatan's Peninsula. The end of the city's splendor began during the Early Post classic (1000–1200 AD). Along with Chichen Itza, Izamal was a Mayan pilgrimage place. Nevertheless, when Spaniards arrived, its original inhabitants were gone and the Cocom tribe was occupying the remains (Millet Camara et al. 2006; Burgos Villanueva and Millet Cámara 2005, 2006; Gutierrez and Rivero 2012; Mezquita Méndez 2006).

¹ Zapoteco is the language of the homonymous ethnic group, who settle mainly in Oaxaca state, in the South of Mexico.

By the time the Spaniards established the city of Merida, in 1542, the evangelization of indigenous inhabitants became more intensive along the Peninsula territory. The Franciscan Order of Minor Friars decided to create three new convents in order to support those in Merida. Saint Michel Archangel in Mani; Saint Francis in Conkal, and Saint Anthony of Padua in Izamal, were the chosen locations. By then, Izamal still was a significant city among the region's indigenous residents (Mezquita Méndez 2006).

In 1553, the construction of the Franciscan Convent in Izamal—dedicated to St. Anthony of Padua—started under the supervision of Fr. Diego de Landa. The current Convent settles over the base of Papulchac (Mayan for "house of the idol's priests") pyramid, the second biggest of those built in Izamal (Stephens 1993; Millet Camara 2000; Gutierrez and Rivero 2012). The place chosen for the erection of the Convent responds to symbolic reasons: the new religion imposes to the old idols showing the power of the conquerors over the conquered ones.

St. Anthony of Padua's Convent was concluded in 1561, and today keeps a good conservation state. It is one of the biggest in the country, occupying 14,678 m² in a complex that includes the *Immaculate conception* church, the convent, the Third Order chapel and the atrium which, after St. Peter's Square in The Vatican, is the largest of its kind worldwide.

In 1560, Diego de Landa—who had asked the wood carved to a sculptor in Guatemala—brought an image of the Immaculate Conception Virgin to Izamal. Since its arrival, the image gained a great devotion between the local population, who attributed a miraculous power to that particular figure (Lizana 1995; Adams and Scholes 1938). Nowadays, thanks to the presence of "Our Lady of Izamal" (the popular name given to this image), the city is still an important regional pilgrimage center.

During the colonial time in Mexico, the Spanish authorities established, since 1543, a "commend" in Izamal, this means that the town was under the authority of a Spaniard lord land. Once Mexico got the Independence from Spanish Crown -1821-, Yucatan's Peninsula was an independent territory, which after many political conflicts became part of Mexican Republic in 1848. Under such circumstances Izamal reached the category of Village in 1823; and it was promoted to City in 1841; in 1923 it lost the previous ranks and kept the category of town until in 1981,

Izamal recovered the category of City (CCMPM 2008; Sefotur 2012).

In the last decades three facts have placed Izamal as a potential destination in the tourist landscape:

- In 1993, Pope John Paul II visited Izamal to celebrate the fifth centenary of the American continent evangelization. The Sanctuary was chosen to reunite representatives of all the American ethnics in a place with indigenous routes (Gonzalez Cicero 1999).
- In 2001, the city was inscribed in the Program Magic Towns, remarking the convergence of Mayan archaeology remains, colonial architecture and buildings of independent Mexico, this mixture confers the city a particular identity. Besides, the crafts and gastronomy are proof of the cultural wealth of rural sites in Mexico.
- In October 2008, under the name “Historical City of Izamal (Izamal, Mayan continuity in an Historical City)”, the property was included in Mexico’s Tentative List² for the Unesco World Heritage Committee, within the Cultural category.

The tourist-historic city: cultural resources and tourist attractions in Izamal

The development of Izamal as a tourist site has been irregular; the data referring to visitors arrivals shows a not very optimistic scene: from 2005 to 2012 the numbers have not increased although in 2008 and 2009 there was a considerable growth (see Fig. 2). On the other hand, the number of accommodations has gone from 4 to 12 units in a 10-year period (2002–2012). Still, tourists stay an average of 1.2 days (Ayuntamiento de Izamal 2012). Nevertheless, the numbers concerning tourist arrivals must be seen with caution because many of Izamal’s visitors are either residents in a close location or they are staying in Merida and only travel to Izamal in a 1-day trip.

In a regional context, Izamal is inside the Mayan World area, which comprises five states: Yucatan, Campeche, Quintana Roo, Tabasco and Chiapas and represent the top destination in the Mexican territory

² A Tentative List is an inventory of those properties that each State Party intends to consider for nomination (<http://whc.unesco.org/en/tentativelists/>).

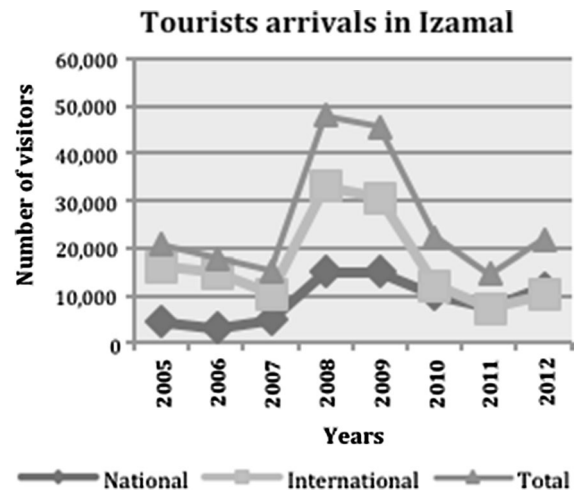


Fig. 2 Tourist arrivals in Izamal for the period 2005–2012

(www.visitmexico.com, Sector 2013). Izamal keeps relatively short distances to major destinations such as Merida (70 km west direction using road 180E); Chichen Itza (70 km east direction driving highway 180D); Valladolid (110 km east direction using highway 180D) and Cancun (250 km through 180D) (See Fig. 1).

Izamal’s geographic location also explains the short stay of visitors: it’s in the route Merida-Chichen Itza-Valladolid-Cancun (or vice versa). Those four destinations altogether reported 5,635,232 tourists in 2012 (Sector 2013) (Figs. 3, 4).

Although the closest airport is Merida’s International Airport, 85 km away from Izamal, regarding roads and highways, Izamal is well connected to other important regional nodes, thus the easiest way to get to the city is by car. Another option that is also easy and cheap is to get there by local bus transportation. Izamal Bus Station offers frequent services to Merida (every hour) and the cost is around 3 USD, the trip lasts about 1.5 h. Departures to Valladolid are scheduled three times a day; the single ticket costs 4 USD. Buses to Cancun depart three times a day, and the trip cost 20 USD, lasting about 5 h.

A net of secondary roads communicates Izamal with small locations such as Sitalpech, Xanaba, Citilcum, Cuauhtemoc and Kimbila. All of them are Mayan communities beginning to develop as tourist hubs following a communitarian model.

Tourism in Izamal is highly related to the regional context: Yucatan is one the Mexican states with the greatest amount of cultural (Mayan remains and colonial cities) and natural resources (natural reserves,

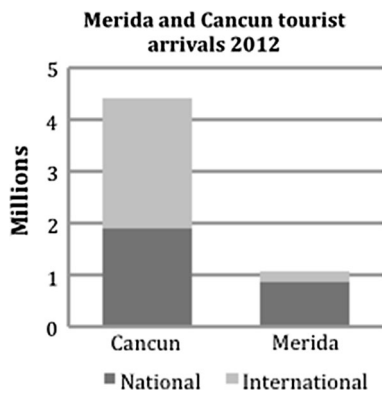


Fig. 3 Tourist arrivals in Merida and Cancun

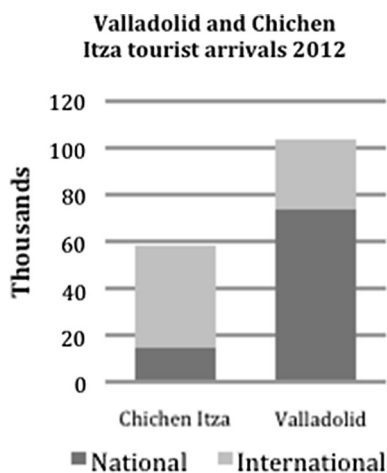


Fig. 4 Tourist arrivals in Valladolid and Chichen Itza

cenotes); not to mention the exceptional intangible heritage denoted in the gastronomy, handicrafts as well as Mayan knowledge and traditions. Literary references such as John Lloyds Stephens' chronic: *Incidents of Travel in Yucatan*, published in 1843, show this area's cultural wealth seen by an early visitor (Stephens 1993).

The strength of Izamal as a tourist destination lies on its historical and cultural heritage. In a general perspective, there are two relevant kinds of monuments: pre-Colombian and colonial.

Pre-Colombian archaeological heritage in Izamal corresponds to one of the most important Mayan sites, probably the largest in the north of Yucatan. So far, 80 pre-Colombian structures have been catalogued within Izamal's perimeter. One of them Kinich Kak Moo, is the third biggest pre-Colombian pyramid in Mexico (after Cholula and Teotihuacan). In the base,

the east–west side is 195 m, while north–south it has 173 m. The height of the structure reaches 35 m (CCMPM 2008; Covarrubias 1989). Above the base there is a 10 level pyramid.

The construction technique developed in Izamal's pre-Colombian buildings shows very distinctive characteristics such as the use of megalithic carved blocks, and the use of rounded corners and high-relief decorations (CCMPM 2008; Millet Camara 2000). All these features can be appreciated in the remains of the five pyramids currently opened for public visit.

The vestiges of the Mayan city inside an urban inhabited area are an outstanding value. In the Mexican territory the convergence of pre-Colombian remains and contemporary cities can be seen in Mexico city and Cholula, but not in the same degree as Izamal where the pyramids are an essential element in the urban landscape; another of the city nicknames is “City of hills” due to the presence of pyramids, called “hills” by local people.

Besides the Maya city, the Spanish town is a peculiar example of colonial and post-independence period architecture developed in Yucatan. Izamal's Historic Downtown perimeter consists of 41 blocks (about 1 km²) where Mayan remains and constructions from 16th to 20th centuries are located (see Fig. 5). Town's layout follows the pre-Colombian plan, keeping the original opened spaces and turning them into the current squares, producing an irregular grid—unlike most of Spanish settlements in America that responded to the chess board Renaissance's design.

The Franciscan Convent (St. Anthony of Padua) is one of the most impressive and well-conserved monuments of the early colonial time in Mexico. All the complex shows a mixture of renaissance and baroque styles and keeps the indigenous essence since it was built over the enormous platform (520 × 430 m) where the ancient Papolchac pyramid stood (Mezquita Méndez 2006; Stephens 1993). In addition to the Convent, Izamal's historic center has many religious and civil buildings, carefully preserved, that represent a heritage from past centuries.

The Historic Downtown has a singular characteristic that makes it different from any other historical town: the buildings are painted in ochre yellow combined with white details (see Fig. 6). This feature has caused Izamal to be popularly known as “The yellow town”.

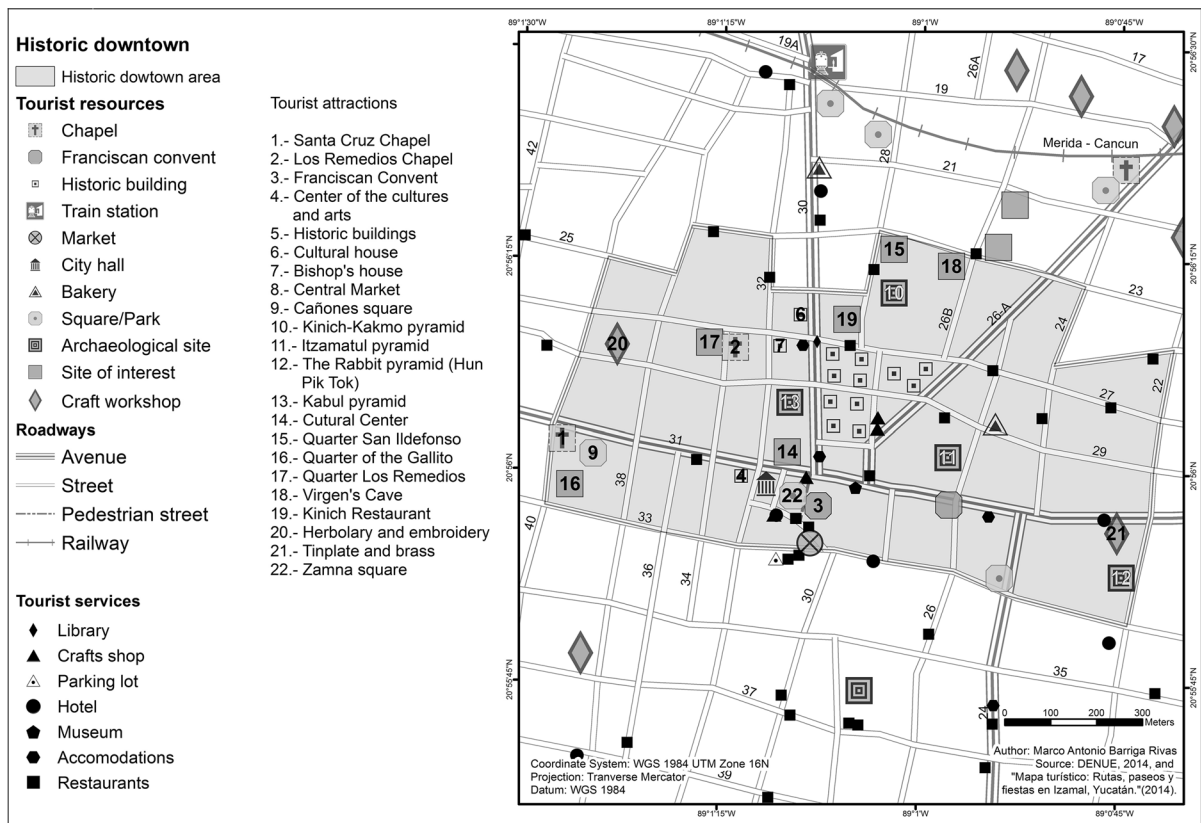


Fig. 5 Izamal's Historic Downtown. Location of tourist resources and services

Intangible facet of Izamal's culture is highly related to catholic tradition (see Table 1). The festivities related to Virgin Mary are the most important for local population (December 8th and 12th). As stated before, religious heritage is a significant value in the town's history since the pre-Colombian period, when the place was an important Mayan religious center, until the present, as a relevant pilgrimage site for catholic devotees.

Also, a copious repertory of legends, linked to specific sites in town, integrates the local identity. Some of the legends originated during the pre-Colombian period and have passed through generations up to now, while others derive from colonial epoch and some others were developed during the course of Mexican Independence (beginning of nineteenth century) and Revolution (beginning of twentieth century). This oral heritage has been recognized and identified through the Legends Route (see Fig. 7) integrated by 11 stops marked with an information plaque that summarizes each legend. "The bull",

"The Virgin and her sister" or "The Arch" are some of the most popular folklore stories.

Gastronomy in Yucatan is recognized by the mixture of Mayan traditional ingredients (chaya,³ achiote,⁴ pumpkin's seeds, corn, deer, habanero chili pepper, avocado) and those brought by Spanish (pork, chicken, onion, species, rice, citrus fruit, cilantro). Izamal is a paradigmatic example of Yucatan gastronomic tradition. Either at the central market or at one of the local restaurants, visitors can taste the traditional dishes prepared by local cookers.

³ Plant used for cooking and medicinal use. It's abundant in southern Mexico and Central America. The scientific name is *Cnidoscolus chayamansa* McVaugh (<http://www.medicina-tradicionalmexicana.unam.mx/monografia.php?l=3&t=Chaya&id=7157> Accessed April 27, 2015).

⁴ Red-orange species extracted from the seeds of a small bush whose botanical name is *Bixa Orellana*. It's widely used in the gastronomy of southern Mexican states (http://www.conabio.gob.mx/conocimiento/info_especies/arboles/doctos/13-bixac1m.PDF Accessed April 27, 2015).



Fig. 6 Front facade of Saint Anthony of Padua's Franciscan convent in Izamal

In Table 1, an inventory and classification of cultural resources in Izamal is described. There's a clear relation between the TP occurred in Izamal through the centuries and the current existence and distribution of the tourism attractions.

Tourism territorial dynamics regarding Izamal's cultural resources

Once the net of attractions and tourism services has been described, the dynamics regarding spatiality of tourism in Izamal will be described through the analysis of nodes and itineraries within the historic city. As stated by Ashworth and Tunbridge (2000) visitors are selective regarding the tourist sites and the tourism machinery tends to an extensive use of some portions of the old cities, usually the surroundings of

the larger monuments, and ignores areas inside the historic core and the rest of the city.

At this point, it's necessary to remark the fact that Izamal, even though is considered in the Magic Towns Program, taking into account the size of its population it is an urban area⁵; hence it can be called a historic city, but since it is a relatively small place with a calm lifestyle, in the popular imaginary is seen as a village or town.

Regarding the tourism dynamics in Izamal, the first remarkable fact is the number of cultural attractions located in the urban nucleus: 25 sites of tourist interest, plus 11 points if visitors decide to follow the Legends route, for a total of 36 spots. These numbers derive

⁵ In Mexico, locations with more than 2500 inhabitants are considered urban settlements (http://cuentame.inegi.org.mx/poblacion/rur_urb.aspx?tema=P). Accessed May 05, 2015).

Table 1 Cultural resources of tourist interest in Izamal

Attraction	Description	Classification
1. Kinich Kakmo Pyramid	Archeological sites. Remains of Mayan temples	Built cultural heritage
2. Itzamatul pyramid		
3. Kabul pyramid		
4. The rabbit pyramid (Hun Pik Tok)		
5. Habuk Pyramid		
6. Chaltun Ha pyramid		
7. Franciscan convent	Catholic churches built during the colonial period	Built cultural heritage
8. Los Remedios Chapel		
9. Santa Cruz Chapel		
10. San Roman Chapel		
11. San Juan Chapel		
12. San Ildefonso Chapel		
13. San Ildefonso's festivity (April 3rd)	Traditional festivities related to catholic faith (excepting Izamal's foundation)	Intangible heritage
14. Santa Cruz day (May 3rd)		
15. San Roman festivity (Sept. 16th)		
16. Christ from Sitalpech (Oct. 18th)		
17. Izamal's foundation anniversary (Dec. 4th)		
18. Immaculate conception celebration (Dec. 8th)		
19. Virgin Guadalupe's day	Historic/cultural spaces	Built cultural heritage
20. Antique Train station		
21. Zmana square		
22. Fine arts center		
23. Cultural center		
24. Central market		
25. Wood carving workshop	Sites where local handcrafts are sold and visitors can have direct contact with the artisans	Intangible heritage
26. Craft paper workshop		
27. Herbolary and embroidery workshop		
28. Henequen jewelry workshop		
29. Hammocks workshop		
30. Knitting workshop		
31. Miniatures workshop	Includes 11 sites where famous local legends took place.	Intangible heritage
32. Tinplate and brass workshop		
33. Legends route		
34. Local cuisine	Exemplary of Yucatan's gastronomic tradition	Intangible heritage

Author's elaboration based on tourist brochures and fieldwork developed in December, 2014

from the fieldwork, as well as the information included in official Izamal's tourism brochures.

The perimeter considered Historic Downtown includes the total of the Legends' route spots, and 13 of the monuments and cultural sites: 4 Mayan pyramids, 3 colonial churches, 3 craft workshops and 3 historical and cultural spaces. Also, 7 of the 12

local accommodations are situated into this core, as well as eight restaurants (see Fig. 5). Therefore, the spatial distribution of resources and services associated to tourism are concentrated in this area, turning the historic space into a tourist node.

In order to explore the historic-tourist territory, the visitors can choose one of the organized tours

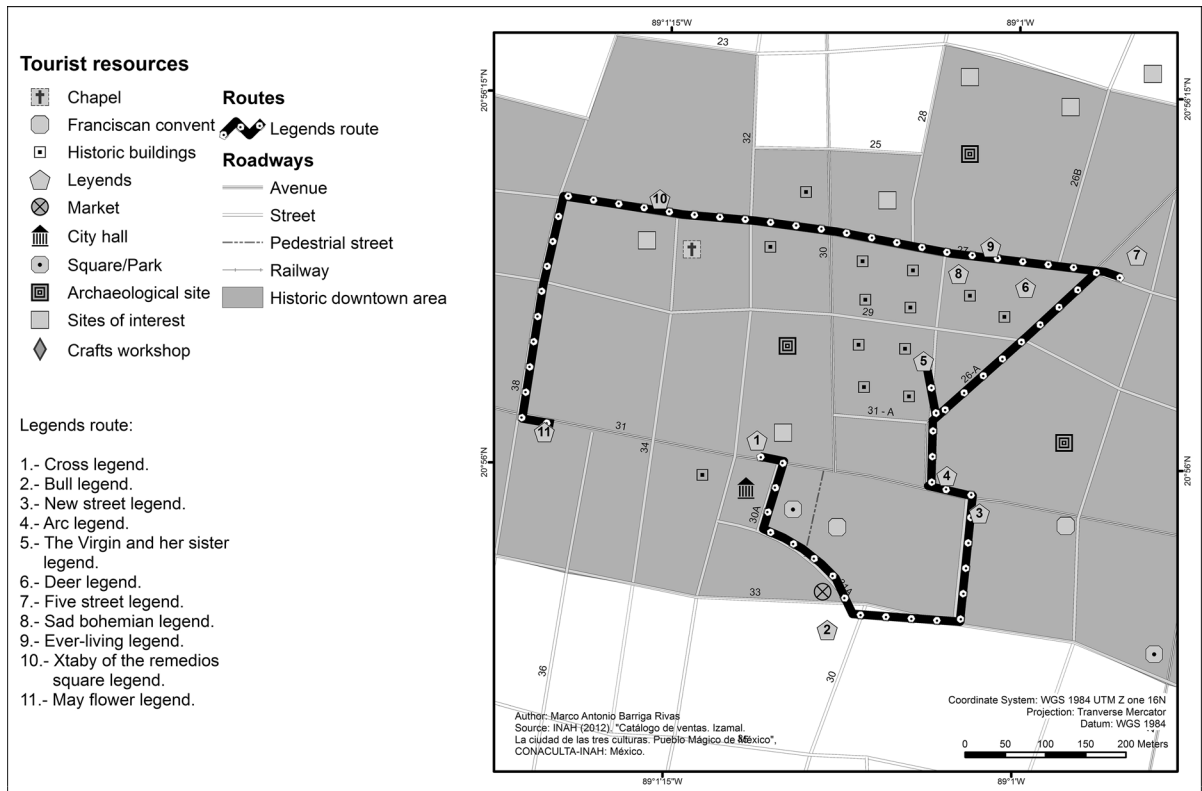


Fig. 7 The legends route in Izamal

available in town, which have two options: carriage tours or walking tours directed by a local guide.

The carriage tours have a long tradition in Izamal. They consist of hiring a “Victoria” (carriage pulled by a horse) and moving around the city, making some stops to visit the sites of interest while the driver explains some of monuments’ features. These kinds of tours can take from 1 to 4 h depending on the structure of the route chosen by the tourist. The basic circuit includes the 4 pyramids and the churches located in the Historic Downtown, including the convent; it costs about 15USD-trip. The itineraries are not fixed and they can be arranged according to the client’s wishes and so is the price: the shorter the tour the cheaper is the cost, and vice versa. A “Victoria” can be hired in the streets surrounding the Convent.

The other option for organized tours is hiring a local guide at the Tourism Office located in front of the convent just across the main square (Zamna Square). The cost of this service is about \$15USD and the tour takes around 3 h visiting the pyramids, the convent, and the churches. Unlike the carriage drivers, the

tourist guides are certified by the INAH (initials for National Institute of Anthropology and History) and have a deeper knowledge of the historical facts and values of the site.

These travelling alternatives are suitable for dependable (midcentric) tourists who prefer the comfort of a fully organized and guided tour (Plog 2004). On the other hand, venturers (allocentric tourists) who prefer to travel according to their own wishes and curiosity are more likely to explore sites for themselves; in this case, Izamal’s Tourism Office has developed some routes to explore the town according to each tourist’s interests.

The brochure, entitled “Routes, walks and festivities in Izamal”, is available for free at any tourist information point either in Izamal or Merida. The proposed scheme divides the visitor’s experience in Izamal in three routes (see Fig. 8), to be developed in 3 days visiting 6–7 sites inside the city each day. According to such itinerary, during the first day, visitors should cover 6.4 km; the second, 8.4 km; the third 4.2 km. In sum, an ideal tour to explore Izamal

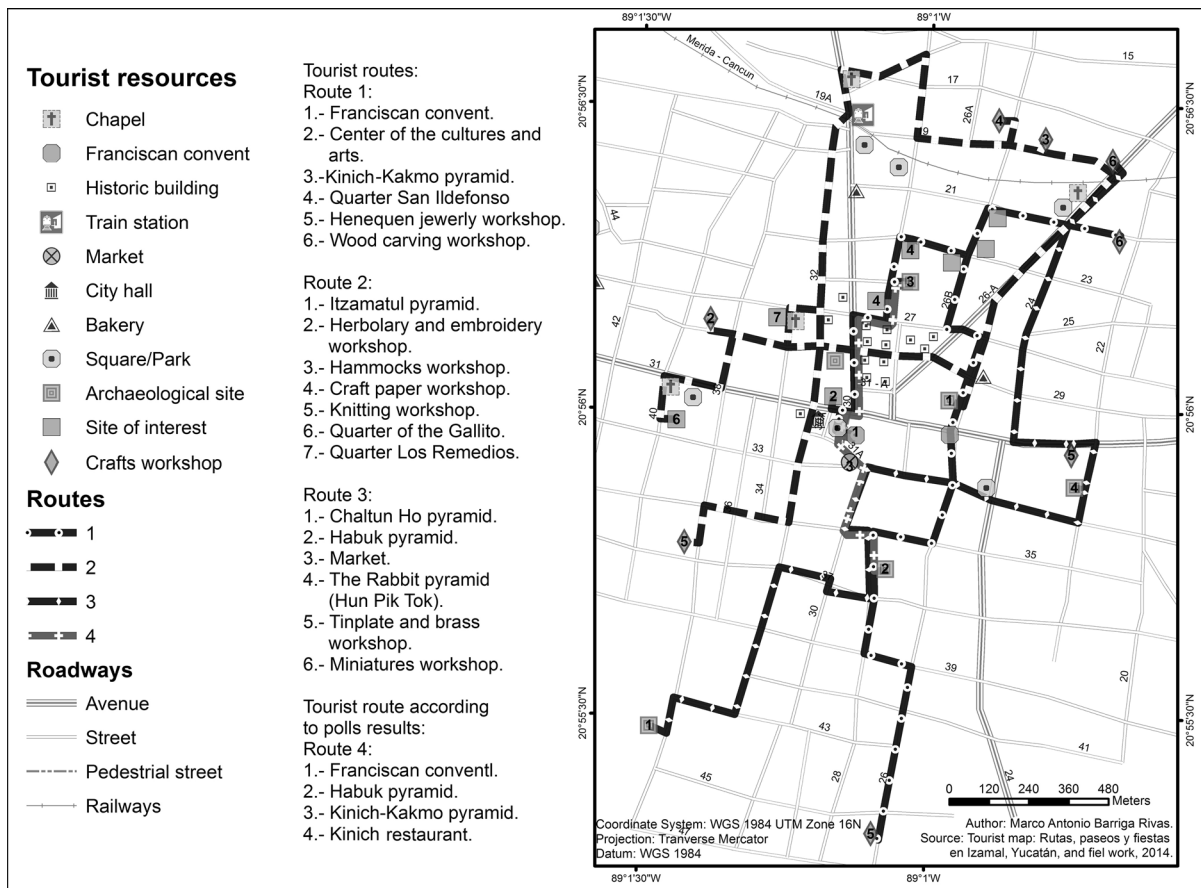


Fig. 8 Proposed tourist routes in Izamal

implies a 19 km tour.⁶ It's important to mention that all the itineraries are focused on cultural attractions.

Nevertheless, what is put in paper fairly reflects reality, according to the information obtained in the tourist's polls and interviews with local guides, visitors in Izamal slightly stay overnight; most of them are staying in Merida as main destination and from there they travel to the Magic Town in a 1-day tour hired in the state's capital. Rarely is Izamal the main or only stop in tours departing from Merida; most of them have Chichen Itza as the main attraction.

According to the information given by local tourist guides, the organized tours usually arrive to Izamal in minivan charters; tourist start their walk at Zamna Square, then they go to the Convent and finally, Kinich Kakmo pyramid. But the place where visitors spend

the most time is at a local restaurant (Kinich) situated just a few blocks from the pyramid (see Fig. 8). Informants stated that those tours take about 3 or 4 h, but only 30 or 50 min are dedicated to see the cultural attractions and the most time is spent at the aforesaid restaurant.

The information provided by the informants was confirmed during the fieldwork through participant observation and also with the surveys. Most of interviewed visitors described their stopover in Izamal as limited to the Convent, Zamna square and the pyramids inside Historic Downtown (Kinich Kakmo, Itzamatzul, and The Rabbit).

Considering this panorama, the itineraries proposed in the brochures do not adjust to the real tourist's movements within the historical city. A virtual tour that considers the sites visited more frequently by tourists reveals that the average distance covered by visitors is 1.9 km, which is a much shorter distance

⁶ Data calculated using ArcGis and the information supplied by the tourism brochure.

than the full itineraries proposed in the tourist brochures as shown in Fig. 8.

These results reflect a limited use of the historical space and show the existence of small nodes inside the main node. The existence of several cultural nodes inside the city is supposed to be the aim of the visit, but only a few of them are actually visited by tourists, so the space is organized in response to the distribution of main attractions. As seen in Fig. 5 most of services related to tourism are arranged around Zamna Square, the Convent and Kinich Kakmo Pyramid.

Visitors and flows in Izamal

In order to establish where visitors to Izamal come from, two primary sources are considered: the polls and the registration book in the Cultural Center. These resources are useful since there is not an official record of the visitor's origin.

Most of the information exposed in this section derives from the polls answered by Izamal's visitors in December 2014. Before going to the results, the profile and some pertinent datum about the interviewed will be briefly exposed.

The data collection is gender balanced: 51 % men and 49 % women. The average visitor of Izamal (according to the polls) is between 26 and 60 years old with a university career, works as a professional, travels by car (own or rented), takes the trip with his/her couple, friends or family in groups of 3–4 people, spends from 50 to 100 USD during the visits to Izamal. In most of cases, the participants had got the information about the city from tourist guidebooks or Internet. The Yellow Town is a destination with a high index of visitor's recurrence: 61 % of the participants had been in Izamal more than once (more than 5 times was the average of previous visits) (See Fig. 9).

The poll's results show that national visitors are predominant (63 % of participants) while foreign tourists represent a significant number (37 %). A more detailed analysis of these results reveals that most of visitors reside in Yucatan state (33 %) and Merida is the home city of the majority (24 %). Mexico City (8 %) and Quintana Roo state (6 %) are the only regions besides Yucatan that seem to be relevant in the number of visitors. In this case, distance seems to have an essential role in the integration of national tourist flows (see Fig. 10).

Considering the international tourists, the most represented country is USA (8 % of the interviewed); also UK (6 %), Germany (4 %), Switzerland (4 %) and Italy (4 %) are significant in the poll's results. The sum of all the European visitors is 20 % (see Fig. 10). Thus, in spite of the geographic distance there is an important flow of tourists from Europe.

On the other hand, the Cultural Center's visitors register shows a very similar panorama: from 238 persons registered in the book between March and December 2014,⁷ 68 % corresponds to national travelers and 32 % to international tourists (see Figs. 11, 12).

In this case, the register book only demands the visitor to write their nationality, making more complex to establish the origin of national visitors; nevertheless, 44 % of national visitors did write their residence state. The review of that group, reveals that most of them reside in Yucatan (18 % of the ones who detailed their place of origin); followed by Chihuahua (13 %) Quintana Roo (11 %) and Veracruz (10 %).

From the foreign visitors who signed in the register, 28 % correspond to USA citizens; 12 %, French; 11 %, Canadian; 5 %, German; 5 %, Costa Rican; 4 %, Spanish. The rest 35 % is divided between 21 countries from the 5 continents: Venezuela, Argentina, Ghana; Australia; Thailand; Switzerland and Italy, are part of the list. Despite the geographical diversity, there's a preponderance of European countries, whose mass represents the 31 % of the visitors registered in the Cultural Center.

In a regional scale, Izamal, for the purpose of this research, can be described from two perspectives: as a tourist node that keeps an important relation with other destinations in Yucatan Peninsula, and as a spiritual magnetism place since the historic city keeps a symbolic significance for the inhabitants (Preston 1992) due to the devotion to Our Lady Of Izamal.

Considering the tourist dimension of Izamal, as pointed out previously in this document, the city has a good connection by land with the state's capital and other relevant tourist nodes such as Chichen Itza and Cancun. Such panorama has a double impact on the Yellow Town tourism activity: on one side the proximity to those places is a chance to be part of

⁷ Is not the total amount of visitors registered; there's a gap in the register book between May and August. During the fieldwork, the Center's manager didn't allow to see the pages corresponding to those months.

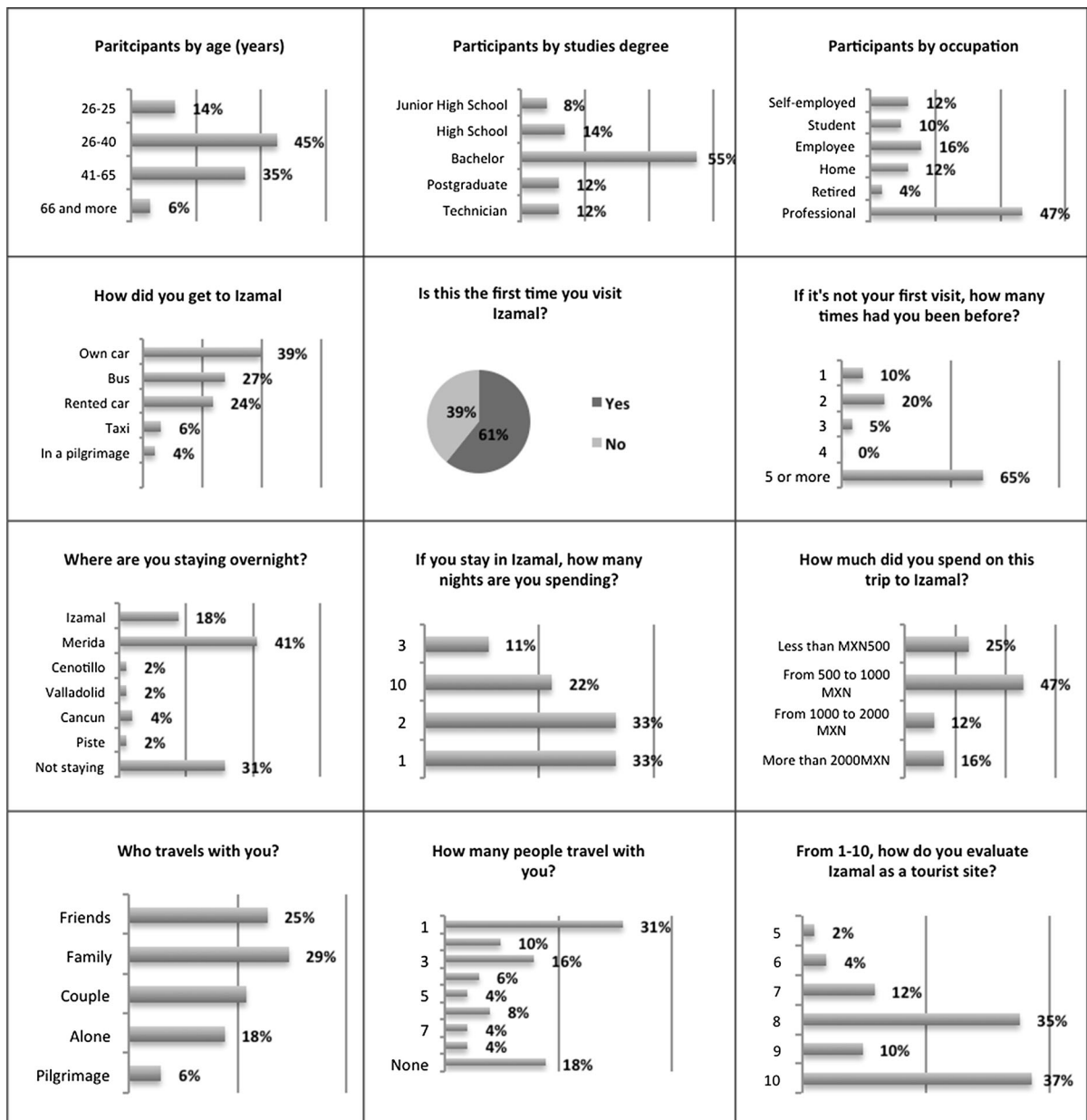


Fig. 9 Main results of the poll

visitor's route; but, on the other hand, it creates a strong contest between destinations where Izamal is the weakest competitor. In order to understand why this happens, the next lines briefly describe the advantages of each destination in terms of tourism attractions and services:

- *Merida* This colonial city has the largest offer of tourist lodgings in Yucatan. In 2013, the city

registered 214 hotels with 7694 rooms available. Besides, there are 356 restaurants with tourist category (Sectur 2013). As a capital city the possibilities for amusement include museums (the Mayan World Museum recently opened), art galleries, historical monuments, shopping malls, and nightlife options such as bars and discotheques.

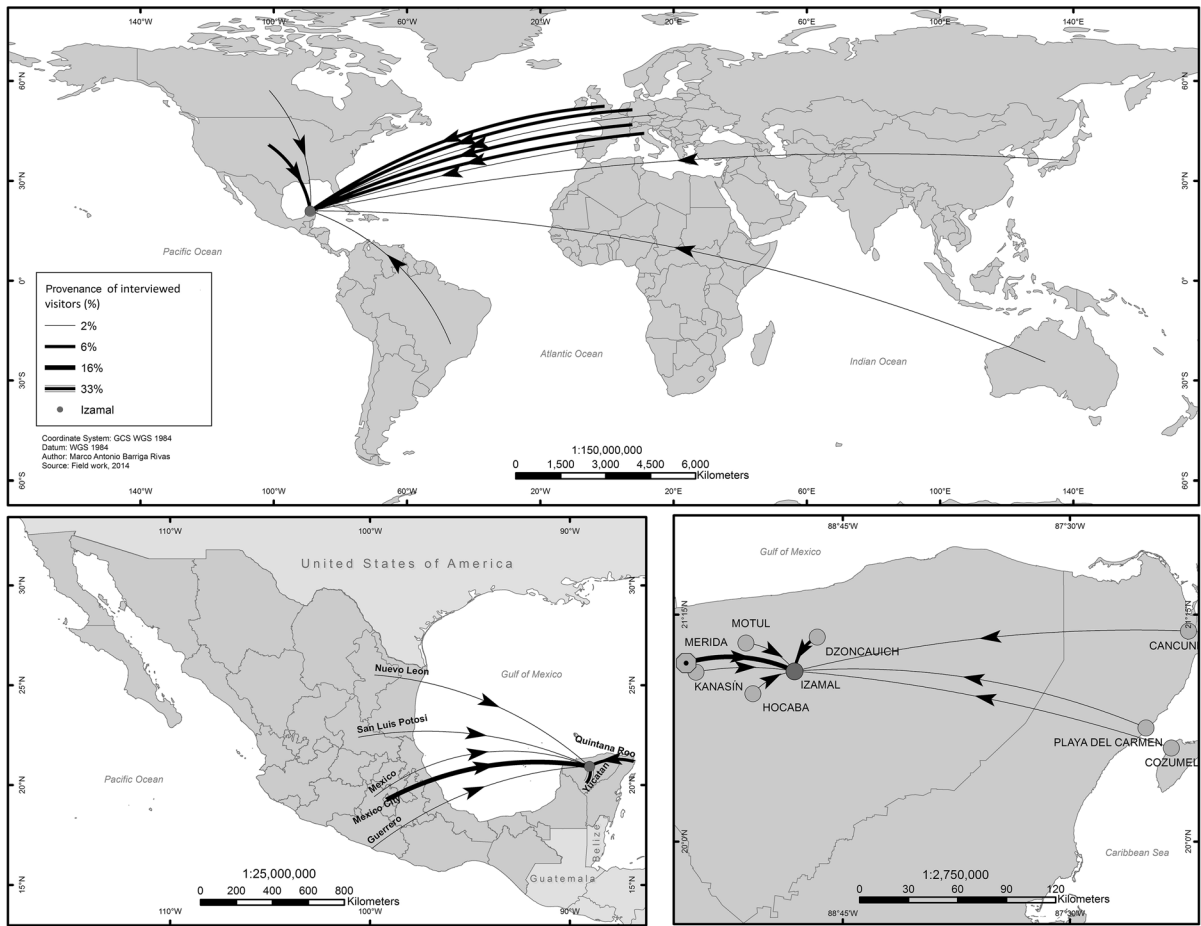


Fig. 10 Geographical origin of interviewed visitors

- *Chichen Itza* Mayan archaeological site included in Unesco’s World Heritage List since 1988. It was an important city and pilgrimage center for indigenous inhabitants occupying more than 20 km² (INAH 2012). This tourist center gained international fame due to the recognition of Kukulcan pyramid as one of the 7 New Wonders of the World in 2007.⁸
- *Valladolid* It’s the second Magic Village of Yucatan (because of its population size, it’s also a city: about 50 thousand inhabitants). It keeps the

- architecture of the colonial period and is the nearest urban center around Chichen Itza (50 km).
- *Cancun and Riviera Maya* Located in Quintana Roo state on the Mexican Caribbean Coast, this region altogether holds the first position in the national context considering the tourists arrivals (9,683,944⁹ in 2013) and the largest number of rooms in tourist accommodation: 82,174 in 2013 (Mexico City reported 47,911 rooms in the same year) (Sectur 2013). Due to the amalgam between Caribbean littorals, Mayan remains, natural reserves and a great lodging infrastructure, this territory has become the most attractive and important tourist center in the country.

⁸ It corresponds to an independent contest organized via Internet by New Open World Corporation (<http://www.new7wonders.com>) and it is not related to Unesco or Mexican Government. Nevertheless, the initiative has been an effective strategy for tourism.

⁹ Considering the official data for Cancun, Riviera Maya (a group of destinations considered so by Sectur), Playa del Carmen and Akumal.

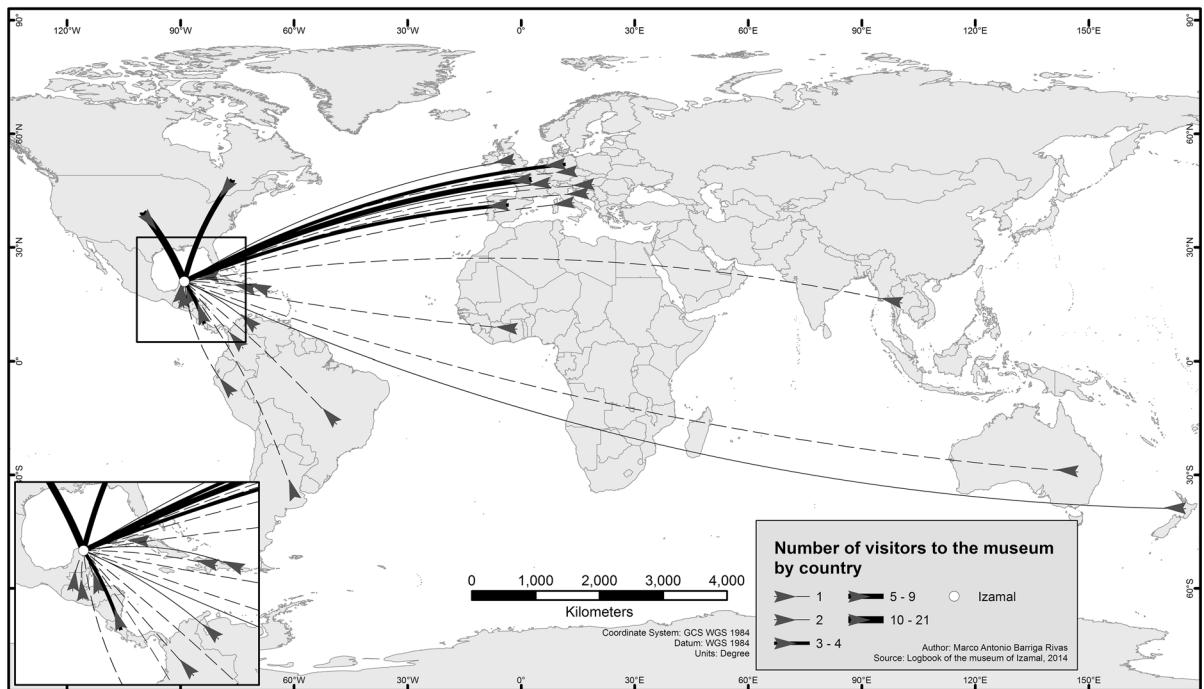


Fig. 11 Geographical origin of visitors to Izamal's Cultural Center

Based on the answers of the poll, it's inferred that tourists who arrive to Izamal are also visiting various locations in the same tour. Only 19 % of the participants mentioned Izamal as the only destination visited during the trip. The rest of them (81 %), were visiting from one to six sites besides the Yellow Town. From that group of interviewed, most visited also Merida (59 %), Valladolid (21 %), Cancun and Riviera Maya (21 %) and Chichen Itza (18 %). Other tourist centers, located in the surrounding area, were listed in a minor degree: Tulum, Uxmal, Campeche, Kimbila, Hoctun, Cenotillo and Celestun (5–3 % each).

Such mobility within the large tourist space integrated by Yucatan Peninsula, justifies why most of visitors don't stay overnight at Izamal and prefer other destinations. From the group of interviewed 41 % had their accommodation in Merida while 10 % were staying at close sites (Valladolid, Cancun), 31 % had their residence nearby and would return home overnight. Only 18 % were staying at one of Izamal's accommodations with an average stay of 2 nights.

As a pilgrimage center, Izamal has a strong magnetism among regional inhabitants whose main object is to visit the Virgin with the aim of asking for a miracle or thank for one that has already been fulfilled.

Since the fieldwork was conducted during December, it was possible to document the arrival of thousands of devotees who were attending to celebrate the Virgin on December 12th. Local Tourism Office states that about 7000¹⁰ pilgrims arrive to Izamal during that festivity. Pilgrims come from locations around Izamal, most of them in groups of sixty or more people. Since distances are not very long, they chose to travel by bicycle, walking or even running; they are called "antorchistas" (torch men) because a person holding a torch leads each pilgrimage.

Devotion to Our Lady of Izamal is revealed as limited to a regional context. The participants in the survey who said seeing the Virgin was the main motivation for the visit (14 % of interviewed) were residents of close locations: Merida, Hocabá, Dzoncauich, Motul, Kanasin (see Fig. 10 for spatial reference).

Non-regional visitors (residents from other states in Mexico and countries abroad) stated that their visit to Izamal was motivated by the desire of simply getting to know the site. How they found out about Izamal also

¹⁰ Information provided by Izamal's Tourism Director on December 14th, 2014.

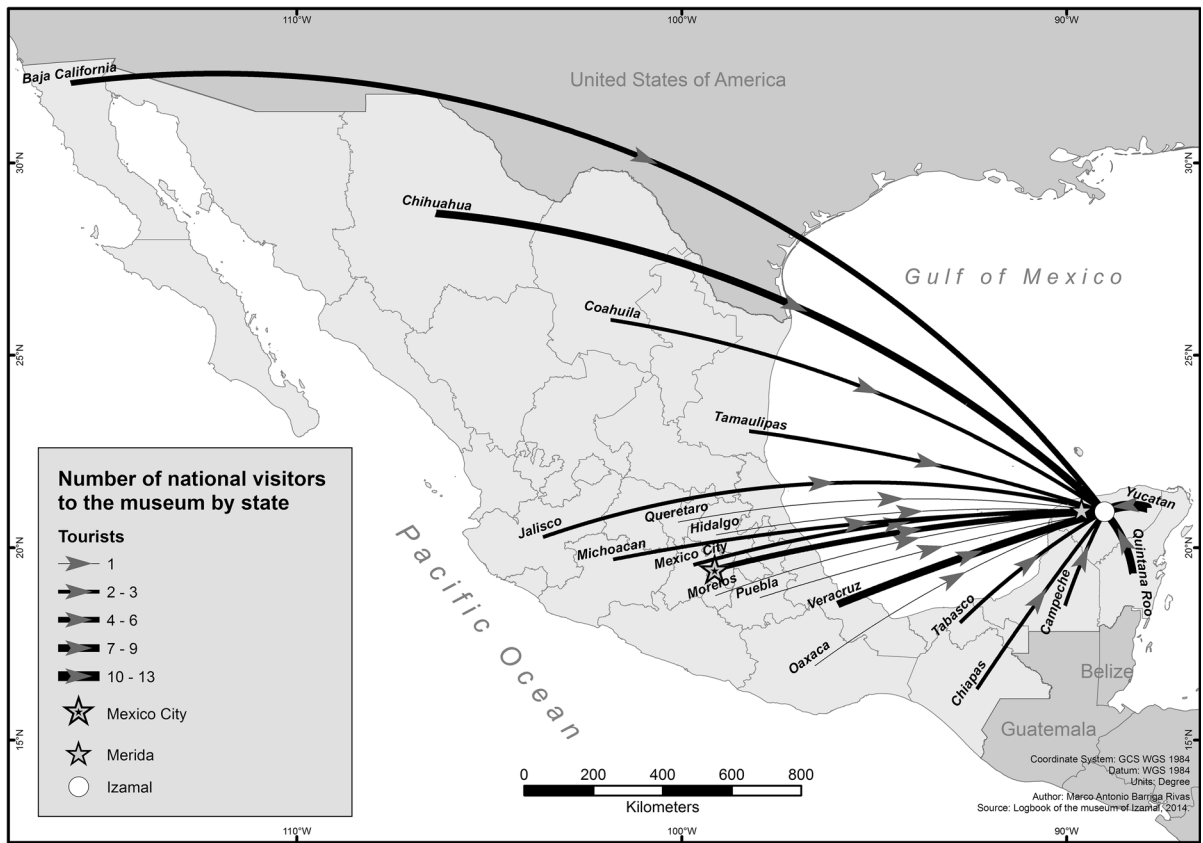


Fig. 12 Geographical origin of national visitors to Izamal’s Cultural Center

makes a difference between regional and non-regional travelers: the first group cannot give a precise source of information since they’ve *always known* about the existence of the town; meanwhile, foreign visitors got information of this Magic Town from Internet, guide books and tourism advertisement.

At this point, considering the information exposed, it’s pertinent to make a brief mention to the role of territorial marketing regarding territorial dynamics of tourism in Izamal. From the many cultural attractions existing in the town, the monumental Convent is the one that has become an iconic image of Izamal, and is widely used in the current tourism advertisement of Yucatan State, as seen on the webpage <http://yucatan.travel> which is the official site of Yucatan Tourism Office.

During the fieldwork, 12 tourism advertisement items were collected: 3 Yucatan’s guides; 4 Izamal’s guides and brochures, and 5 fliers of Izamal’s local hotels, restaurants and guided tours. All these

documents are available for free at tourism information spots in Merida or Izamal.

With the exception of one of the fliers, all of the items collected use Izamal’s Convent as the image to represent the town. The same happens with the yellow color that characterizes buildings within the Historic Downtown: it has become a symbol of the city. Such iconography matches the perception of visitors, both national and foreigners. When they were asked to choose an image that could be used to describe Izamal, 31 % of the interviewed chose the convent while 23 % referred to yellow color; other words used by participants were: religion (Virgin, the Pope), 9 %; peace and tranquility (9 %); picturesque colonial architecture (6 %) and small town (4 %). Elements of Mayan culture fairly appeared in the answers: pyramids (3 %) and Maya inhabitants (2 %).

Despite the fact that Izamal counts on a large amount of territorial resources associated to culture and heritage, tourism advertisement and tourists tend

to reduce all the richness to a few elements: the Convent and the yellow buildings. Obviously, the strategy of territorial marketing consists in promoting the most attractive elements of each place in order to create a mental image in the potential consumers (Anholt 2009; Gold and Ward 1994; Morgan et al. 2011). The disadvantage of such place branding derives in the territorial dynamics developed by visitors, as in the case of Izamal, which tends to ignore large sectors of the urban space. Consequently, visitors get a shallow experience in relation to local culture and history and the host territory is fragmented and segregated as a result tourism dynamics.

Conclusions

Izamal is a town that has been able to survive the change through centuries: from a Mayan sacred site to a colonial town and now as a tourist and pilgrimage place. This historic place keeps memory of every epoch it has lived; turning Izamal into a unique space whose cultural heritage has become a tourist attraction.

The application of the TTO methodology to study the territorial dynamic of tourism in Izamal, has proved to be a useful tool to reveal how this small location is linked to other sites at regional, national and international scale thanks to the nets developed by the tourism system. In the case of Izamal, territorial dynamic appears as a wide spectrum when regarding tourist flows. Visitors from countries in the five continents arrive to the town with the aim to see this quiet yellow town and its historical monuments. On the other hand, the spectrum of territorial dynamic gets narrow when referring to visitors' movements inside the town. In this case, the area of interest is limited to a small percentage of Izamal's urban area. Although historic downtown is where most of monuments and services for tourists are located, not the entire perimeter is included in the tourism dynamic, basically the tourism nucleus is around the Franciscan Convent and the blocks surrounding Zamna Square.

The consequences of the aforesaid partial use of space are tangible in the built heritage inside the town: meanwhile those historic buildings and squares located in the tourism core of Izamal show a good state of conservations, some other that are out that influence area look careless, abandoned or in ruins. It happens the

same with the appearance of the streets: the ones that are inside historic downtown or are important for tourists transit look clean, with a neat stone pavement; and on the contrary the streets less transited are dirty and dusty. Concisely, the territorial dynamic generated by the tourism activity inside Izamal has a direct incidence in the space segregation and the unequal use and preservation or maintenance of the town.

Seemingly, spatial segregation is a tendency in tourist sites, wheatear if they are beach or cultural destinations, as it has been exposed in other academic researches (Ashworth and Tunbridge 2000; Lopez López 2001; Lopez López et al. 2006).

On the other hand, the analysis of territorial resources from the tourism perspective reveals that Izamal counts on several sites, and intangible heritage which perform as tourist attractions. Due to the variety of the tourist assets existing in the town, it is suitable for visitors who have different motivations. Cultural tourism is undoubtedly the main vocation of Izamal, but it also counts on the capital to develop other of special interest: archeological tourism (Mayan remains); spiritual tourism (the devotion to Our Lady of Izamal); gastronomic tourism (local cuisine), ethno-tourism (living Mayan culture) or even industrial tourism (remains of old haciendas close to the town).

From a territorial perspective, Izamal counts on several advantages to develop as a successful destination: it's has a communication net that links the town with other tourist nodes; it has many cultural resources and services inside the location; and tourist flows from different parts of the world (specially European). Nevertheless, the biggest challenge is to change the visitors into tourists, that means to increase the number of travelers that choose Izamal as a destination to spend a couple nights and not only a few hours. Since the territorial marketing is also focused in a few elements, a strategy to change the current reality should be focused on a positive exploitation of the many cultural resources existing in town and increasing the services required by cultural tourists: art galleries, museums, heritage interpretation centers and cultural events. In a mid term perspective, Izamal tends to continue as a secondary destination regarding non-regional visitors, but the city has the advantage of receiving a large amount of regional visitors during religious festivities, and this last group can be as important to local economy as non-regional travellers.

Acknowledgments The author wants to thank Coral Velazquez for collaboration during fieldwork. Also a special acknowledgment to Marco Antonio Barriga for the cartographic work.

Compliance with ethical standards

Conflict of interest The author declares that she has no conflict of interest.

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