

You can visit Miramar on your own or on an organized tour. To **travel independently** takes some time and effort. The jumping-off point is the *ejido* and major army base of San Quintín, where most transport drops you. From there, you need to catch a lift or walk the 2km to the *ejido* of **Emiliano Zapata**. When you arrive, if not directed to the relevant person, ask for the *comisario* or *presidente*, either of whom will be able to organize the practicalities, charged per day: M\$100 for a guide, M\$50 for a porter, M\$100 for the use of canoe (highly recommended) and around M\$30 per person to camp or sleep in hammocks in lakeside palapas. Then it's a further nine-kilometre hike to the lake from here. There are a few shops and simple cafeterías in San Quintín, but supplies in Emiliano Zapata are very basic, so it's best to bring your own food.

Getting to Laguna Miramar

By far the easiest method of transport is to **fly** to **San Quintín** in a light aircraft from Servicios Aéreos de San Cristóbal (☎963/632-4662, 🌐www.serviciosaereos.sancristobal.com), arranged by the *Hospedaje Esmeralda* in Ocosingo (see p.711). If you can't fill a plane (the hotel-arranged tours are US\$500 for four people), you can also contact the airline directly – if they have space they might let you fly one way for M\$350.

Of the **overland** options, the most established route is the bone-shaking six- to seven-hour, 130-kilometre ride in a pick-up truck **from Ocosingo** to San Quintín (M\$75). Trucks known as *tres toneladas* leave between 9am and noon, depending on demand, from the depot behind Ocosingo market on 3a Calle Sur Oriente. In theory, the journey is faster **from Comitán**, where you first take a frequent *combi* to the small town of Las Margaritas, 16km northwest (M\$25), then pick up another *tres toneladas* to San Quintín, about three to four hours away. But this route passes through **La Realidad**, a celebrated Zapatista stronghold, and may lead to extra hassle at military checkpoints in the area – check with the Comitán tourist office, or *Hospedaje Esmeralda*, before trying this.

A more expensive but far more exciting alternative is to take a Transportes Tzoyol *combi* from Comitán to Amatitlán, in Guatemala, then arrange a **boat** (M\$1000; 3hr) to take you up the Río Jataté to Emiliano Zapata.

North to Palenque: Agua Azul and Misol-Há

A series of magnificent **waterfalls** is the chief attraction along the winding mountain road between Ocosingo and Palenque. The dazzling cascades on the Río Shumulhá at **Agua Azul** and the exquisite falls at **Misol-Há** are more easily visited on a day trip from Palenque (see p.714), though it is possible to visit them independently and stay nearby.

Agua Azul

The impressive waterfalls of **Agua Azul**, in the Parque Nacional Agua Azul, 58km north of Ocosingo and 4km off the main road, are now a major tour-bus destination. The main cascades lie near the car park at the end of the access road, with several smaller but equally appealing rapids stretching for 1km up the river. The whole area is certainly picturesque, though the river near the lower falls is lined with rows of souvenir stalls and snack vendors. Adjust your expectations accordingly, and it still makes for a pleasant trip.

If you come **by bus** (not on a tour), you'll be dropped at the turn-off to the falls on the main highway, where you'll probably have to walk 45 minutes downhill to the waterfall (and at least an hour's sweaty hike back up, or an M\$10 taxi ride). Villagers have set up two tolls along the road; at each (if manned), you'll be charged M\$10. If you need to stay near the falls, simple **cabañas** (👉) are for rent

– ask at the Modulo de Información near the car park – but they're not as nice as the ones at Misol-Há (see below).

If it's safe to walk upstream (it may not be in the rainy season), you'll come across a perilous-looking bridge over the river and eventually reach an impressive gorge where the **Río Shumulhá** explodes out of the jungle-covered mountain. At the right time of year, the river is alive with butterflies. Higher up, the swimming is a little safer, too – but don't go in at all if you're not a strong swimmer. People drown here every year, and though a few signs warn of **dangerous currents**, they don't begin to mark all the perilous spots. Although you may want to get as far from the tourist scrum as possible, keep in mind that violent attacks have occurred here in the past. A heavy federal police guard has proved a major deterrent, but you're always safer with other people nearby.

Back on the highway heading north, it's another 64km to Palenque – some tours call at **Agua Clara**, another waterfall 10km from Azul, which is good for swimming but otherwise not as attractive.

Misol-Há

Only 18km from Palenque, **Misol-Há** (M\$15) is a much easier day trip than Agua Azul if travelling by public transport, and in many ways far more pleasant, with none of the slapdash development present at its celebrated neighbour. A 25-metre waterfall provides a stunning backdrop to a pool that's safe for swimming, and a fern-lined trail leads along a ledge behind the cascade – refreshing from the spray and mist even if you don't swim. It's an easy 1.5km walk downhill from the road (though not so much fun in the other direction); there's an additional M\$10 charge if you arrive by car. The San Miguel *ejido* manages the area, offering a decent **restaurant** catering to tour groups, as well as inexpensive **accommodation** in some beautiful wooden cabañas (☎ 55/5329-0995 or 916/345-03456, 🌐 www.misol-ha.com; 📍); each cabin has a private bathroom and electricity, and some also have kitchens. The organization recommends advance reservations, especially during Mexican holiday times.

Palenque

Set in thick jungle buzzing with insects, the ancient Maya **ruins of Palenque** are for many the finest of Mexico's Maya sites: less crowded than Chichén Itzá, larger than Uxmal, and with the most spectacular setting. It is a relatively small site – you can see everything in a morning – but a fascinating one, strongly linked to the lost cities of Guatemala while displaying a distinctive style.

Nine kilometres east of the ruins, the rather helter-skelter **town of Palenque** has 65,000 inhabitants and every facility a visitor might need. An excellent base for exploring the ruins and the waterfalls in the nearby hills, it is lively enough, with music in the turquoise-painted plaza most evenings, but – save for a small **museum** on the plaza, devoted to the textiles of Chiapas – it has no real intrinsic appeal. As there are a number of excellent camping sites, cabañas and hotels near the ruins, you may prefer not to stay in town at all.

Arrival and information

Arriving on any long-distance bus (except for Lagos de Montebello vehicles), you'll be at one of two nearly adjacent **bus terminals** on Juárez, just off the main highway through town. If you know when you're leaving it's worth buying your onward ticket as soon as you arrive – or at any rate as soon as possible – as buses