



TRAVEL GUIDE
CANCUN - RIVIERA MAYA

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You might think you know Cancun – 14 miles of pristine white beaches shaped like a number “7” crystalline waters and sultry nights sipping on the perfect margarita, right? Well, you’re both right and wrong. If this is your idea of what Cancun is all about, read on. There’s so much more.

The history of Cancun dates back to 1967 when the Mexican government, recognizing the importance of tourism to the country’s economic future, began a detailed search to pinpoint ideal sites for tourism development. Resting on the northeast corner of the Yucatan Peninsula in the state of Quintana Roo Cancun was a part of the ancient Mayan civilization and is still considered the gateway to the Mayan World.

Cancun has the distinction of being the one Caribbean destination with the infrastructure, modern amenities and service philosophy to rival leisure destinations worldwide. Unlike many other parts of the Caribbean and Mexico, Cancun was built for tourism, and continues to meet the needs of its over 3.3 million annual visitors. Cancun delivers to travelers the best of many worlds: the Caribbean and Mexico; modern and ancient; action packed and laid back. Cancun is unequalled in its ability to offer cultural treasures, natural beauty, infinite activities and North American-style conveniences.

Due to its near perfect weather, natural beauty and easy accessibility from North American gateways, Cancun emerged as the government’s top candidate. What was once a remote and tiny fishing village of just 12 families was cultivated into the ideal Mexican vacation spot. It capitalized on, without compromising, the region’s natural resources. You will find Cancun’s hospitality staff to be among the best-trained in the world at leading hotel brands represented in here—from the major names in affordable accommodations such as Best Western and Holiday Inn to the very best in luxury such as Ritz-Carlton to Hilton.

The landscape of Cancun encourages the growth of many exotic flowers, such as flamboyances and fascinating fauna, like the prehistoric-looking iguanas.

If you are a sports enthusiast, Cancun will not disappoint. It boasts great five golf courses, incredible coral reefs for snorkeling and scuba diving, sport-fishing and jungle tours. And if lying on a white-sand beach with the clear blue Caribbean lapping at your suntanned toes is what you long for, then Cancun delivers. Some of the most beautiful beaches in the world are in and around Cancun making it Latin American’s most important leisure destination.



RIVIERA MAYA Introduction



The Riviera Maya extends along the Caribbean coast of Mexico's Yucatan Peninsula from Puerto Morelos to the Sian Ka'an Biosphere Reserve. Once home to small fishing villages, the Riviera Maya coastline has since been developed into a modern tourist corridor offering the very best of high-end luxury resorts, fine dining, nightlife, spa retreats, shopping and golf in Mexico. An ideal vacation destination, the Riviera Maya is home to some of the most stunningly beautiful beaches in all of Mexico with expansive stretches of powdery white sand lapped by the clear turquoise waters of the Caribbean Sea.

Spend the day at a luxury beach club where you can enjoy swimming, sunbathing, aquatic sports, spa services and a variety of modern amenities. You'll find some of the best in the resort destination of Playa del Carmen, a friendly tourist town where you'll also discover the Riviera Maya's best shopping, dining and nightlife.

The Riviera Maya is one of the world's top destinations for scuba diving and snorkeling. An expansive coral reef system extending just off the coast is home to a dizzying array of marine life including colorful tropical fish, manta rays, dolphins and whale sharks. Scuba diving and snorkeling in the Riviera Maya are not limited to the ocean. You can also go snorkeling and cave diving in the many cenotes that are unique to this Yucatan Peninsula.

The Riviera Maya is a top ecotourism destination in Mexico and throughout the region the natural environment is protected and preserved. Outside of the major tourist destinations, much of the land remains relatively undeveloped so the natural beauty of the Riviera Maya and the creatures that inhabit it are left to flourish. Local eco-parks offer a taste of all that the area has to offer in controlled, family-friendly environments.

Mexico is a country rich in history, culture and tradition, all of which you will experience when you visit the Riviera Maya. Participate in a traditional temazcav ceremony at one of the many resorts and spas. Explore the magical underground world with a dip in an underground sink hole. Visit ancient Mayan ruins at Tulum, Coba and El Rey.

Adventurous travelers should venture off the beaten path to visit traditional Maya villages where you will witness the traditions and culture of this fascinating region and sample the local cuisine. A few hours inland, the Mayan ruins at Chichen Itza are arguably the best restored and most impressive of the Yucatán Maya archaeological sites.

Consider a day trip via ferry from Playa del Carmen to the Caribbean island of Cozumel where you will enjoy world-class scuba diving, snorkeling and aquatic sports, or, simply spend the day relaxing on the beach.



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Climate

The weather in Mexico is as varied as its geography: there are tropical forests, arid desserts, fertile valleys and snow covered mountain peaks. The coasts are generally warm throughout the year, although it is very rainy during some months. In Mexico City, the weather is quite pleasant, neither too hot nor too cold. In the central highlands, the weather is cool, as well as in the mountainous areas. In some northern states, such as Monterrey and Chihuahua, it is very hot in summer and extremely cold in winter. Before traveling to Mexican beaches, make sure it is not hurricane season.

Currency and Exchange

The official currency in Cancun and Riviera Maya is the Mexican peso but American dollars are also widely accepted. Banks are open Monday-Friday from 9am to 4pm but there are exchange houses found all over the area that are open much later.

Currency exchange offices: You will usually find a currency exchange counter at international airports throughout Mexico; these can be identified by the "Exchange" sign. You will have to show your passport in order to be able to exchange money. The exchange rate is usual shown as "buy" or "purchase", which shows how many pesos you will receive for each dollar.

Banks: Not all banks provide the service of exchanging pesos and dollars, and some require you to have an account with them. Ask someone at your hotel to tell you about the location of the nearest bank where tourists can exchange their currency. You will also need a valid U.S. passport to make the exchange.

Automated Teller Machine: One of the most convenient ways to buy pesos is by using an ATM. You will often receive better exchange rates, even though you have to pay a service fee, as with most ATMs outside your bank network. Please do not accept any help from people who are not bank employees.

Credit card: If you have a credit card, you will find that it provides one of the best exchange rates. Although you will not receive pesos directly, your monthly balance usually shows the exchange rate you received on purchases made with the credit card.

Tips

It is customary to leave a tip to thank waiters, valets, gas station employees, bellboys and other service providers. At restaurants, bars and coffee shops, it is customary to leave 10% of the total amount of the bill; if the service was very good, you may wish to leave up to 15%. Some restaurants and bars include the tip in the final bill, so be sure to check this in order not to overpay. Not tipping is frowned upon.

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Language

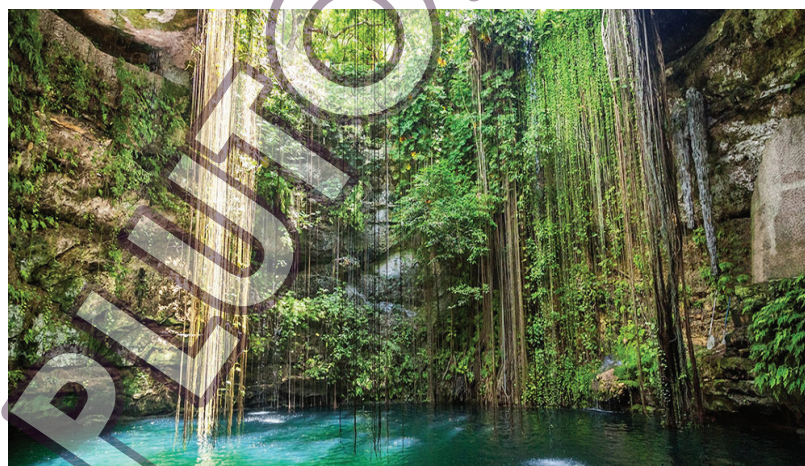
Mexico does not have an official language at federal (national) level. Mexico has 68 recognized languages, but Spanish is the main one. The other 67 are indigenous languages that, although officially recognized, people almost never speak. Spanish is used by virtually the whole population and all public communications are conducted in the language. Bilingual signs in Spanish and English might be available in popular tourist destinations.

English is understood by many in Mexico City as well as by some tourist workers in popular tourist places, but nevertheless, most Mexicans don't speak English. Educated Mexicans, especially younger ones, and professional businessmen are the people most likely to speak some English. The most popular foreign languages to learn within Mexico after English are French, Italian, German and Japanese. Among clerks, policemen, and drivers there is essentially no such thing as knowledge of foreign languages.

Mexico has one of the richest diversity of languages, with more of 60 indigenous languages spoken within the Mexican territory. These languages are spoken within the communities of these indigenous peoples, who are largely segregated from mainstream mestizo society. In any case, the probabilities of finding a speaker of any of these languages is small, since only half of 20% that comprises Indian population in Mexico speaks indigenous languages. On the other hand, most of these communities are fluent in Spanish as well. Therefore learning any of these indigenous languages is not indispensable at all; quite the opposite, unexpected and will gain a lot of respect from these communities.

Electricity

The standard Cancun electricity supply is 110 volts. Hotels usually offer voltage converters for 220 volt devices. Many sockets do not accept polarized or three-prong plugs so it is recommended that you bring your own adapter but you can usually buy these in the hotel shop.



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Going Out



Food

Mexican cuisine is recognized as one of the three most popular food styles in the world. Where better to enjoy it than Mexican restaurants in Cancun and Riviera Maya?

The Yucatan peninsula has a style of food all of its own which you can find in many restaurants in Cancun & Riviera Maya. The culinary delights of a typical Yucatecan kitchen come from a mouth-watering mixture of European and Mexican flavors. A lot of the dishes from this region are not spicy yet are absolutely delicious. You also have the typical Mexican food with delicious char-grilled meats with a variety of different sauces to try. Brave the habanero chile. This mild-looking pepper is fire-hot, but serves as an excellent condiment to some of Mexico's finest culinary delicacies.

Nightlife

You will not find another club like COCOBONGO in Latin America that offers such variety. Acrobats equal as those seen in Cirque du Soleil, impersonators bringing to life pops stars such as Madonna, Michael Jackson, Britney Spears etc. Not to mention the best DJ's in Cancun and Riviera Maya. All of this excitement and energy brought to you with the help of mega screens of the highest resolution. You will find people dancing everywhere making their visit to COCOBONGO an unforgettable experience.

Source: visitmexico.com, cancun.travel

