nileGUIDE
ALL YOU NEED TO PLAN YOUR PERFECT TRIP

Jennifer Williams

Adventure Cancun

Cancun, 5 Days

Table of contents:

Guide Description 2

Itinerary Overview 3

Daily Itineraries 5

Cancun Snapshot 12

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Guide Description

AUTHOR NOTE: With one of the world's largest and most beautiful coral reefs, an incredibly diverse ecosystem, and plenty of great ways to explore them, this is the perfect place to actively enjoy the Caribbean and the Yucatan.

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Itinerary Overview

things to do
restaurants
hotels
nightlife

Day 1

DAY NOTE: For a relaxed stay outside the main hotel area, opt for a stay on Isla Mujeres at the Avalon Reef Club. On its own islet, this is perfectly located for a spontaneous swim or snorkel. The Avalon offers all-inclusive package, which also includes water activity equipment and bicycle rentals. Or you can also fend for yourself meal-wise, which is easy to do in a place like Isla Mujeres, with tons of little food stands selling fabulous local cuisine on the cheap. Less snooty than some of the other more luxurious resorts, but with several beautiful beaches and easy access to tons of activities, this is the perfect base for your vacation. For your first day, rent a golf cart or some bicycles to explore the island of Isla Mujeres. There are beaches all the way around the island to stop and swim at, and just stop by a dock to pick up a boat if you feel like heading out in the water a bit for some snorkeling. Stop for lunch at one of the tamale or taco stands in the town square, then spend the rest of the day at Garrafon Natural Reef Eco Park. On the southern tip of Isla Mujeres, Garrafon is a beautiful eco-park with a range of activities in and out of the water. Snorkel, ride the zip-line, hike, kayak, your afternoon away at this ecological paradise. You can grab dinner here, too, at Tamarindo, or try another restaurant in downtown Isla Mujeres such as the Picus Cockteleria, where you'll see your seafood come out of the ocean. Doesn't get much fresher than that.

Day 2

DAY NOTE: Take a day trip to check out some of the area's most beautiful nature areas and historical sites with Alltournative Off-Track Adventures, a company committed to sustainable ecotourism. Try their Maya Zip-Line & Tulum Tour. You'll start with a stop at Tulum, the ruins of an incredible ancient Mayan city overlooking a beautiful beach. You'll spend a couple of hours here touring the archaeological site and then the city of Tulum, then will move on to a site in the jungle where you can zip-line, and can swim and snorkel in a crystal-clear cenote, or underground river. You'll get back to Isla Mujeres in the late afternoon, and should bike or golf-cart over to enjoy some more fresh seafood at Sunset Grill on the beach.

Day 3 - Cancun

DAY NOTE: Nautilus Dive center is well-known as one of Cancun's most professional and reliable dive companies, and you'll see why when you take a lesson (if needed) and head out for a reef and wreck dive with their knowledgeable guides. The reefs around Cancun are some of the world's most beautiful, and you can see tons of corals, colorful fish, and occasionally sea turtles, sharks, and whale sharks. There are also several fascinating shipwrecks to explore underwater around Cancun and Isla Mujeres. For a fun afternoon activity, head to Rancho Loma Bonita, a ranch and beach club, where you can take a combination ATV and Wave Runner tour. You'll ride through the jungle and mangrove forests on the ATVs before ending up on the beach, and then will switch to Wave Runners for an adrenaline-filled ride on the water. Try Mango Cafe, one of the best restaurants in the area, for Caribbean fusion in the evening.

Nautilus Dive Training Center
Learn how to scuba dive!

Rancho Loma Bonita ATV
Off-road tour

Rancho Loma Bonita Wave Runners
Ocean adventure

Day 4 - Cancun

DAY NOTE: Ecocolors is a tour company that advocates responsible and sustainable Mexican ecotourism, and their guides, all biologists or naturalists, are incredibly informed about all of the local flora and fauna. Take their day multi-sport tour of the Sian Ka'an Biosphere, a protected area and World Heritage site filled with ancient Mayan history and a wide range of habitats, from lagoons and marshes to beaches and dunes. On the Ecocolors tour, you'll kayak through the Campechen lagoon, visit the museum and visitor center, hike through the dunes and along beaches, and swim and snorkel in a cenote. Lunch is included, but bring water and sunscreen, as usual. After you get back to the hotel in the evening, head to Bamboo, in downtown Isla Mujeres, for dinner. They've got the usual delicious sushi and other seafood dishes, but also have fabulous Thai fare and great live music.

Ecocolors
Communing with nature

Day 5 - Cancun

DAY NOTE: Spend your last day in Cancun further exploring the area around Isla Mujeres, starting with a visit to the Contoy Island national park. Just north of Isla Mujeres is the tiny, uninhabited island of Isla Contoy, covered with migrating and rare birds. You can hike here, visit the museum and get a beautiful view from the

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Itinerary Overview

towering lighthouse, picnic on the beach, and take a boat and snorkeling tour of the magnificent reefs surrounding the island. Hop on a boat back to Isla Mujeres in the early afternoon. There's a sea turtle sanctuary on the island, where you can visit to see the hatching, breeding and rehabilitation program in progress, or head to Dolphin Discovery for a last, unforgettable experience in Cancun. Here, with the Sea Life Discovery package you get to interact with dolphins, manatees, and sea lions in this beautiful, natural setting. For your final dinner on the Caribbean, head to Olivia's for truly incredible Moroccan-Greek fusion in a beautiful tropical garden setting. The mojitos are fabulous, too.

Parque Nacional Isla Contoy
A wild paradise

Contoy Island Tour Bird Sanctuary
Contoy Island tour bird sanctuary

Dolphin Discovery Cancun/Isla Mujeres
Unforgettable experience

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Day 2

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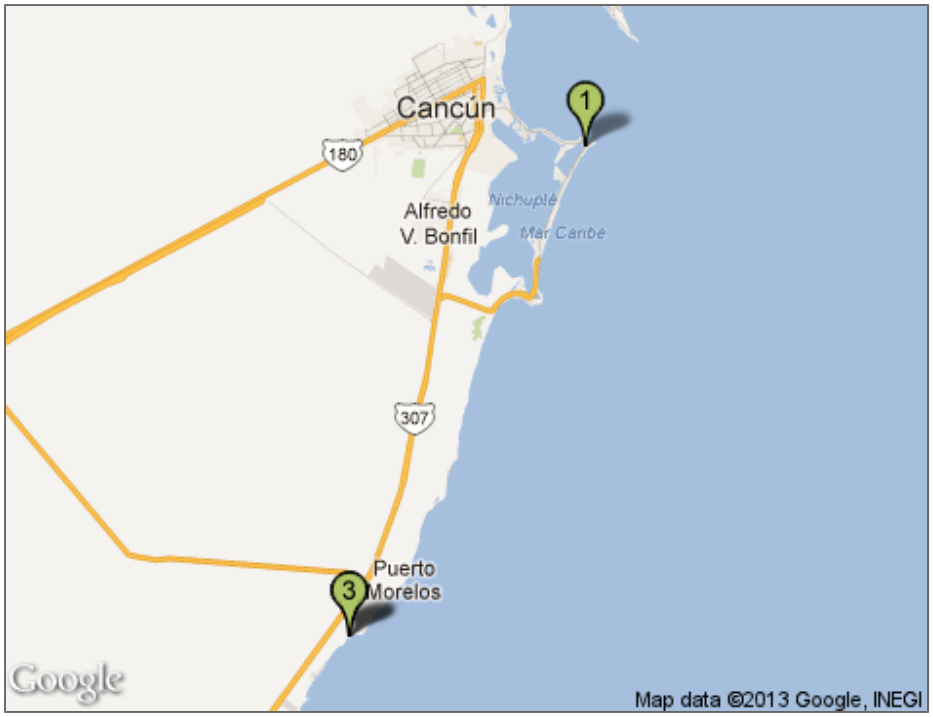
Day 3 - Cancun



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contact:
tel: +52 998 892 1148 / +52 998 873 2982
http://www.cancunscuba.com/

location:
Bolulevard Kukulcán
Kilómetro 3.5
Cancún 77500

hours:
M-Sa 9a-6p

1 Nautilus Dive Training Center

DESCRIPTION: Scuba diving is one of the most popular outdoor activities in Cancun and, as such, there are plenty of options. But before venturing into the sea, it is strongly recommended to get advice from experts like the Nautilus Dive Training Center. Their experienced team of professional divers will be able to provide training before getting into the sea. Some of their courses are held in swimming pools and with all the safety requirements to help new divers gain confidence. For prices, timetables and training, please contact Nautilus directly.
© wcities.com

Photo courtesy of Nautilus Dive Training Center

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contact:
tel: +52 998 887 1708
http://www.rancholomabonita.com

location:
Carretera Cancún-Tulúm
Kilómetro 41.5
Cancún QR 77500

hours:
Daily 9a, Noon & 3p

2 Rancho Loma Bonita ATV

DESCRIPTION: Just a 40-minute drive and you are at the private ranch where you receive a quick training lesson on our modern ATV quads in the training field. You are than ready to set out to conquer the jungle. The routes are well-maintained for your safety and pleasure. When you reach the beach front you than can cruise along the Caribbean coast line or stop for refreshments and take the optional jet ski tour. After a jaunt through the sand dunes, cruise back through the jungle to the ranch. There you can relax at the ranch next to the pool or the shaded area and have complimentary Mexican snacks and refreshments. © wcities.com

contact:
fax: +52 998 887 1708
http://www.rancholomabonita.com

location:
Carretera Cancún-Tulúm
Kilómetro 41.5
Cancún QR 77500

hours:
Daily 9a, Noon & 3p

3 Rancho Loma Bonita Wave Runners

DESCRIPTION: At Rancho Loma Bonita you can enjoy jet skiing off their beautiful natural scenic private beach which has no buildings, just a shaded refreshment area. This calm beach makes for smooth skiing. You can cruise off the scenic coast line and see really truly natural tropical beach areas. Their modern jet ski fleet of single and two-seaters are reliable and extremely stable. Both experienced and novice riders will delight in this experience. © wcities.com

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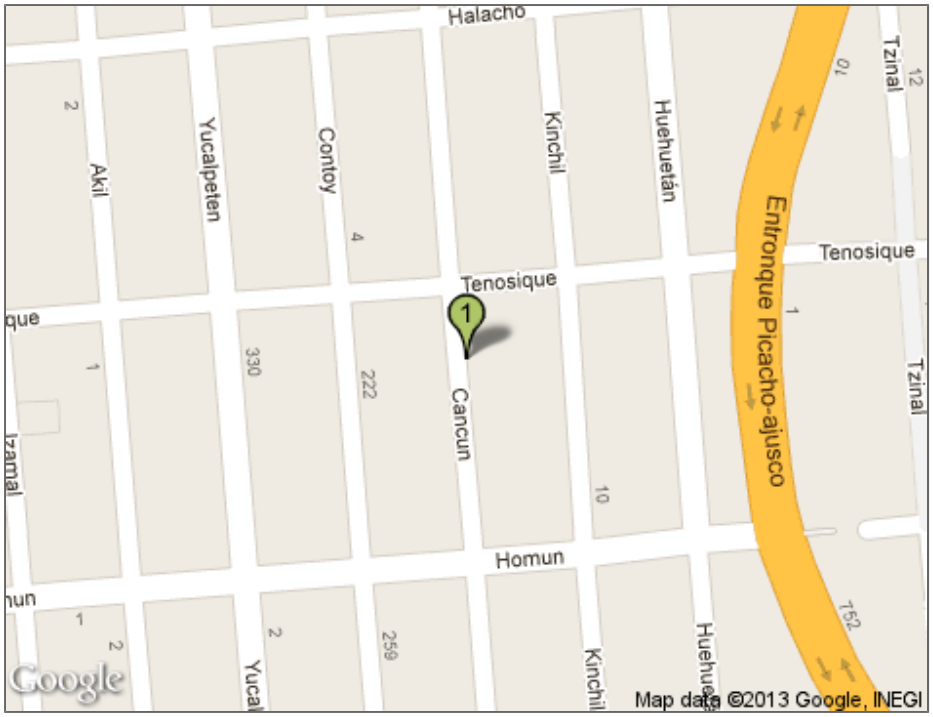
Day 4 - Cancun



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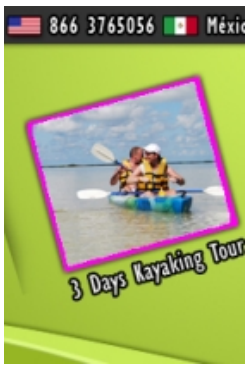
contact:
tel: 52-998-884-3667
fax: +52 998 884 9214
http://www.ecotravelmexico.com/

location:
Calle Cameron 32, Smza 27
Cancún QR 77509

1 Ecocolors

DESCRIPTION: An environmentally aware tour operator with ecotours through the Mayan world, including biking, bird watching, kayaking, snorkling, and visiting archaeological sites. © wcities.com



ecotravelmexico.

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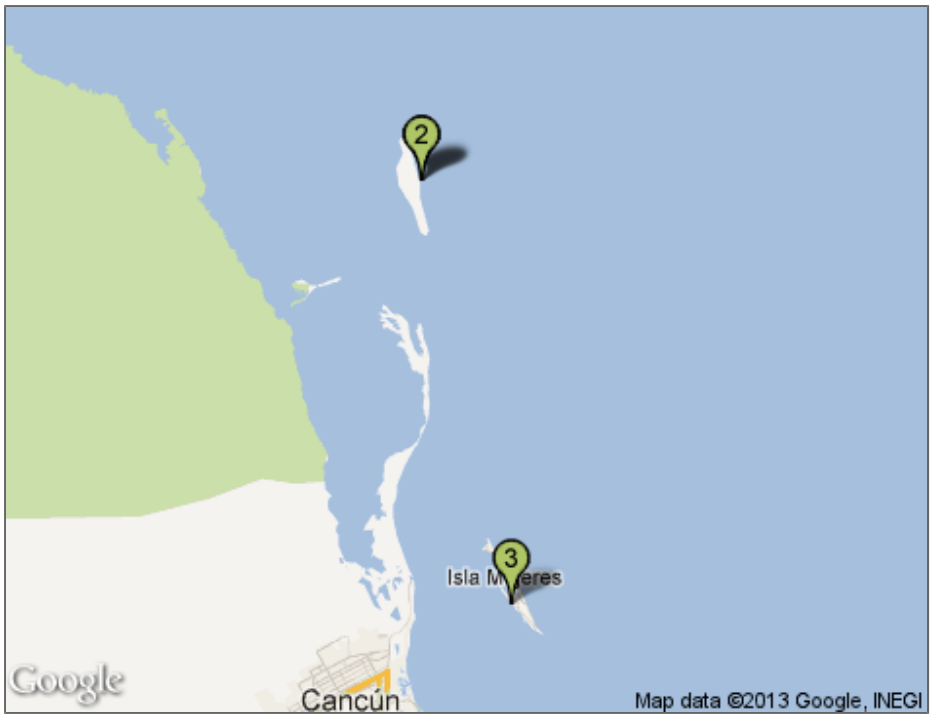
Day 5 - Cancun



QUICK NOTE

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1 Parque Nacional Isla Contoy

contact:
tel: +52 998 849 7525
fax: +52 998 849 7525
http://www.conanp.gob.mx/anp/pagina.php

location:
Tours available from Isla Mujeres and Cancún
Isla Contoy QR 77500

DESCRIPTION: Isla Contoy, one of the beauties of nature, has been preserved as an ecological reserve. It is surrounded by mangroves, where the flora and fauna are zealously protected by the Mexican authorities. An expedition to this island is a must for nature lovers or adventurous spirits. Enjoy the waters in a small boat, watching wildlife in its natural habitat. You will be surrounded by monkeys, birds, small mammals and fish. Ask for expedition timetables and prices at your hotel reception or from a travel agent. © wcities.com

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contact:
tel: +1 877 264 0929
http://www.contoytours.com/

location:
Km. 5 Hotel Zone
Quintana Roo QR 77500

hours:
Tu-Th, Sa 9a-6p

2 Contoy Island Tour Bird Sanctuary

DESCRIPTION: This tour begins by leaving Cancun at 9a and cruising throughout the Caribbean sea heading to Contoy Island. Once you arrive at Contoy Island you will have a guided tour walking around the island which includes a trip to the site museum and the windowed four stories tower, where you will be able to watch the hole Island and it's nature. With over 6,000 fauna and floral examples this island is truly a beautiful unique place where very few have had the opportunity to see. A barbecue buffet lunch of fresh fish, chicken fajitas, pasta, and vegetables is provided, drinks and sodas are available all day. The second part of the tour is a jaunt to Isla Mujeres (Island of Women) where you can go shopping at the many unique shops, have a coffee at beach front restaurants or recline on the beach. © wcities.com

contact:
tel: +52 (998) 193-3350
http://www.dolphindiscovery.com

location:
Camino Sac Bajo Lote 26.
Fraccionamiento Paraíso
Laguna Mar, Isla Mujeres
Cancun Quintana Roo 77500

3 Dolphin Discovery Cancun/Isla Mujeres

Photo provided by Dolphin Discovery

OUR LOCAL EXPERT SAYS:
Use only biodegradable sunscreen because its ingredients will not cause damage to the nearby coral reefs or to other marine life.

DESCRIPTION: Dolphin Discovery has been around for over 20 years and one of the top tour companies offering Swim with Dolphins excursions, in Cancun. The dolphinarium is actually located on the island of Isla Mujeres, just a few miles off the north shore of Cancun. Each day, tours depart from Cancun at 9:00am, by ferry. It will only take you about 20 minutes to sail over to Isla Mujeres and, once you are on the island, the fun will really begin. There are several different dolphin experiences available. The Sea Life Discovery Plus tour includes continental breakfast, a lunch buffet, open bar, the use of Dolphin Discovery's beach club, plus you get to interact with dolphins, as well as manatees and sea lions. The Dolphin Royal Swim at Isla Mujeres + Royal Garrafon program includes an American breakfast, a lunch buffet, open bar, snorkeling with sharks or stingrays, 50 minutes in the water with the dolphins, and admission to Royal Garrafon eco-park, which is one of the most popular attractions on Isla Mujeres.   © NileGuide

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Cancun Snapshot

Local Info

Established in 1970, Cancun is still a relatively young city. In her short lifetime, however, she has made quite a name for herself. The popular tourist destination is known as a mecca for sun-worshipers, who visit the area to take advantage of the miles of beautiful, white-sand beaches, and for it's incredible nightlife, which rivals that of Las Vegas and Ibiza. Each year, millions of people flock to Cancun from all around the world but, due to their close proximity to Mexico, the majority of visitors are from the United States and Canada.

Cancun went through many changes as it evolved into the world-class resort area that it is today. It was first known as a Spring Break hot spot in the 1980s and still has the reputation of being a"party" town. While you can still find many amazing bars and nightclubs in Cancun, it is no longer the non-stop party that many people still believe it to be. Quite the contrary, in fact. Nowadays, Cancun is the home to numerous family-friendly resorts, adults-only resorts, which are popular with honeymooners, and to many ultra-luxurious hotels that cater to the rich and famous. In fact, it is not uncommon to see celebrities, or even world leaders, at some of the high-end resorts, or to brush elbows with famous people in Cancun's nightclubs.

The city of Cancun is divided into two very different sections. There is the downtown area of Cancun, known as"El Centro", where most of the area residents live, and there is the Zona Hotelera(Hotel Zone), where all of the beachfront resorts are found. Most tourists opt to stay in the Hotel Zone, since that is where the beaches and major nightclubs are located, but you will also find tourists in downtown Cancun, where the hotel prices are lower. El Centro has a very Mexican feel, with cobblestone streets, taco stands, and large flea markets. Conversely, the Hotel Zone is full of high-rise hotels and condominiums, upscale shopping malls, and gourmet restaurants.

Area attractions, such as the Mayan ruins of Chichen Itza and other important archaeological sites, like Coba and Tulum, can easily be reached from Cancun. Eco-parks, where visitors can enjoy water sports, learn about area wildlife and plant life, swim with dolphins, learn about Mexican culture, or just lounge in hammocks on the beach, are wonderful places to visit on sightseeing excursions. Xcaret and Xel-Ha are the area's largest and most popular eco-parks. Day trips to visit the small island of Isla Mujeres, just a 30-minute ferry ride from Cancun, or to the nature reserve of Isla Contoy are also nice options for sightseeing tours. Each of these parks and attractions are suitable for families with small children and adults of all ages(although there can be quite a bit of walking on some of the tours).

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History

The Rivera Maya lies in the Southern part of the Mexican Republic, the Eastern area of the Peninsula of Yucatán, and on the Caribbean shoreline. It is called the Mayan Riviera due to the influence the pre-Hispanic civilization exerted throughout the region, extending from Punta Brava to Punta Allen. The Northern coast boasts an impressive development of its tourist infrastructure, while the Southern shore is dotted with small picturesque villages surrounded by unspoiled beaches. Gran Arrecife Maya, the world's second largest barrier reef is found off these shores and along with the tropical forests of exotic vegetation and mangroves, they constitute a veritable window into the biodiversity of Mexican wildlife species. The South is also well known for its underground rivers, sacred reservoirs, deep-sea caves and caverns.

The Mayans were the original inhabitants of this peninsula. Advanced in the sciences, their civilization is recognized for the intelligence and precision of their calculations as well as the complexity of their religious rites. The peninsula was an important center of commercial and religious activity during the post-classical period, which dates from approximately 1000 CE to 1500 CE. The Tulum Archaelogical Zone was a fortress on the Caribbean shores, Playa del Carmen was then known as Xaman-Ha, and what is now the Xcaret Ecological Park was known as Puerto Pole. Cobá Ruins, with a population of 50,000 inhabitants, was the most important city.

With the arrival of the Spaniards in 1519, the principal Mayan cities, such as Chichen Itza and Uxmal had already been abandoned. The wars and conquests of other peoples, harsh climate and the dangers of the tropical forest, combined with the frequent threat of hurricanes, made it difficult for the civilization to prosper. Xel-Ha went down in history as the first European settlement. Even so, during the colonial period, population growth was hampered due in part to the frequent pirate attacks at sea. These assaults hindered access to firm ground, even when reached, the dense forest provided further troubles, and thus the peninsula remained unexplored for several years.

In 1967 the Mexican Government recognized the importance of the tourist industry as an active ingredient in the country's economy. Given its natural beauty, which would tempt any traveler, this paradise was poised as a strong candidate for foreign investment towards the development of a hotel and entertainment infrastructure. The Palacio Maya and Club Med were the first hotels built in the 1970s, both blessed with exaggerated exclusivity.

Considered a strong tourist attraction during the 1990s, it wasn't until that decade in which Cancún experienced significant growth with the construction of hotels, American-style shopping centers and an array of entertainment facilities.

Cancún is presently divided into three districts: The town of Cancún, with a population of approximately 300,000 and a simple, practical infrastructure; the Ecological Reserve with its incredible lakes, rain-forests and mangroves; and the Hotel Zone, an island of hotels and shopping centers.

There are over 26,800 hotel rooms available, 200 restaurants, and several hundred shops in the city while paved and dirt roads enable access to the tropical forest.

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Many facets of Cancun combine to offer the natural attributes of a Caribbean paradise framed within the vestiges of one of the most advanced and intelligent civilizations of the ancient world.
©

Hotel Insights

Where to stay? How much will it cost? What amenities and services are included? These questions arise upon planning any trip for business or pleasure. There are a variety of options available to meet any traveler's budget, four-star and luxury hotels, thegran turismo andcategoría especial. Four-star hotels are ideal alternatives for good service at reasonable prices.

Hotel Zone

Hotels within the hotel zone include the Aquamarina Beach Hotel, the Moon Palace Golf& Spa Resort, which has a wonderful and interesting nature reserve nearby. Some other hotels include the Caribbean Princess, which is located right on the beach, the Sun Palace which is purportedly great for weddings and with white sands outside your door. All are conveniently located in the island's Hotel District and have a restaurant and bar, ocean view rooms, launderette service, room service, long distance phone access, parking facilities, tourist information office, gift shops, and many other amenities.

Five-star hotels are much more abundant and many belong to international hotel chains, such as the Hotel Krystal Cancún, Meliá Turquesa, Westin Resort& Spa Cancun, JW Marriott Cancun Resort& Spa y la Sierra Cancún.

Gran Turismo hotels offer complete luxury, each with their individual touch. They include the Dreams Cancun Resort& Spa, Hyatt Cancún Caribe, Presidente Intercontinental, and Fiesta Americana Condesa, to name a few.

Categoría especial hotels offer special packages with international airlines and tend to be slightly lower in price. Among these, are the Fiesta Americana Grand Coral Beach, boasting an enormous spa, the Ritz Carlton and Le Meridien Cancún. Most have a business center fully equipped for meetings, conferences, or any other corporate event.

All have bilingual staff, and some have personnel exclusively in charge of organizing games, events, and beach tournaments for guest entertainment. Most offer tourist information services to assist in restaurant reservations and organizing day trips to different nearby destinations. Emergency assistance is also provided through access to consulates, clinics and hospitals in the region.

Downtown

Alternative accommodations are available outside of the Hotel Zone. Modestly priced, these places do not offer the luxury which is characteristic of the five-star andgran turismo hotels. Located in the city, these small, affordable hotels are ideal for low budget travel. Hotels such as Suites El Patio, Hotel Plaza Kokai Cancún, Hotel Plaza Caribe and the Hotel Tankah all offer great prices and for those that are looking for a more authentic touch of Mexico. Some other moderately-priced hotels that are located on the Nichupté Lagoon where the lagoon meets the sea are the Sina Suites,Hotel Imperial Las Perlas, Hotel Caribe Internacional, very close to many restaurants and the Barceló Costa Cancún with shopping centers nearby. The increasingly popular ecological tourism organizations offer even more modest accommodations, recommending various beach campsites and rustic cabins. These options are suitable for indulging in the great outdoors and fresh air of Cancun.

Outside of the City

If you would like to experience a vacation outside of the hustle and bustle of the city and seek more relaxed environs, there are a few hotels such as the Hotel Casa Maya located on Isla Mujeres(Women's Island) and a perfect place for newly-weds. The Iberostar Paraiso Lindo is another place to enjoy many activities or if you prefer, just relax and get some rest. An upscale hotel located in the serene Puerto Morelos is the Paraiso de la Bonita Resort& Thalasso. This hotel has a massive spa and offers cruises on a luxury catamaran.

As the most popular tourist destination in the country, it is recommended that prior reservations be made when traveling to Cancun, especially during the popular season. Although most hotels are equipped for the possibility of an unpredictable hurricane, bear these occurrences in mind upon deciding when to visit, as the winds or rain may spoil the opportunity to fully enjoy all that the city has to offer. Nevertheless, the opportunity to visit should not be missed, as it is bound to be an unforgettable experience.
©

Restaurants Insights

Nestled in the heart of the Mexican Caribbean, this natural paradise is referred to by many as a Garden of Eden. No doubt, the first explorers to arrive found a splendid and beautiful land of promise that included fine powdered sand and sapphire waters and emerald-green vegetation all bathed by a brilliant sun in the celestial sky.

Today's Cancún was born in the 1970s as a popular tourist destination, boosted by massive foreign investment in the hotel industry. The city has continued to grow into a perfect combination of natural beauty and man-made facilities. It is an ideal place for visitors to come, year after year, later returning home with unforgettable memories and experiences. Cancún exists today as a mixture of its a pre-Hispanic past, a vanguard culture, unlimited entertainment, and enclaves of unspoiled nature.

For fun and satisfaction, there is an unlimited variety of bars and restaurants in the city catering to a visitor's every whim. It is impossible to leave here without visiting at least one of the popular spots that the island's nightlife has to offer.

Hotel Zone

For a healthy and natural option, vegetarian meals can be savored at the restaurant

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100% Natural. Italian cuisine can also be enjoyed on the island at Gustino Italian Grill, Casa Rolandi, Aioli, La Dolce Vita which has been in Cancún for years, and the moderately-priced Fantino among many others.

For children and adolescents, there is nothing more entertaining than the theme restaurants Planet Hollywood Cancún, Rainforest Café, and Hard Rock Café Cancún.

Among other popular eateries is the restaurant El Cambalache, which specializes in Argentinean cuisine. Seafood lovers should go to Lorenzillo's, Sushi Itto and the Crab House. For those seeking a cut of prime rib can turn to Ruth's Chris Steak House Cancún and La Capilla Argentina Steakhouse. There are also many restaurants offering a wide range of international dishes such as Señor Frog's and Harry's.

When the daytime fun has ended, it is time to venture out into the nightlife, in this city that never sleeps. The"in" crowd gathers at Bulldog, Daddy'O and Daddy Rock. For a real crazy time, you can go to one of the most popular clubs in South America called Coco Bongo. For Latin music, go to Azucar.

Spots that definitely should be included in any after-hour itinerary include, Señor Frog's, where the atmosphere gets hotter as the night transpires, and Carlos& Charlie's in addition to Pat O' Brien's Cancún, where people party until dawn. Bar Roots is a famous place where you can listen to all types of music and has a sports bar feel. Some places have open-air dance floors overlooking the ocean, all of which have a bilingual staff.

Downtown

Outside of the hotel zone there are other establishments that have the same excitement and interest as the hotel zone, although there are less of them. Japanese food can be splendid at Yamamoto. For a little bit of international cuisine, there is Casa Rolandi, which serves up moderately-priced Italian food. Tacolote is a popular Mexican restaurant where the dishes combine homemade goodness and great flavor. Romantic dining can be found at Habichuela, where romance takes center stage upon the cozy, delightful patio. For a more enlivened scene, check out Roots Jazz Club to hear music until dawn and enjoy a light meal or strong drinks. This splendid island city not only preserves its natural beauty, but also offers an array of activities to enhance a visitor's stay. Don't forget to bag up a slice of the Mexican Caribbean to take back home.
©

Nightlife Insights

Boredom simply does not exist in this beautiful resort area of the Mexican Caribbean. There is a wide assortment of attractions, which can keep you engaged for even the lengthiest of visits. Whether you want to relax on the beach or explore an ancient ruin, there is something for everyone.

Nightclubs& Nightlife

The city comes alive after dark. Go along to Bacco's in Plaza Terramar or Santa Fe Beer Factory at Forum by the Sea. If you fancy staying at the location for a long time, you could go to Zandunga, where you can sing along with Mariachis and enjoy the Mexican party. When it comes to bars with a lively atmosphere, try Carlos and Charlies, Señor Frog's, Gap del Caribe and Tequila Rock where you can also enjoy a diverse buffet. If you are creature of the night, enjoy partying, live music and staying up all night having fun, Cancún offers a wide variety of choices as to what you can do until the early hours of the morning. If you're into club atmospheres, the best options in Cancún are The City and Dady'O.

If what you are really after is good live music venues, Cassis is a club where you can listen to jazz late into the night. The Hard Rock Café is another obvious option, offering the best rock and roll in town. For a good Jamaican party go to Cat's Reggae Club. You are bound to take back memories of Mexico's music, people and relentless mood for partying. Admission prices vary, but most of the discos and clubs include drinks in the price. What to wear? Generally, people dress quite casually in bars, although they do tend to dress up a little more in discos. With all of the color and variety that exists in this paradise, the possibility of a boring night is impossible. Enjoy your stay, and get dancing! ¡Buen provecho!

Historical Sights

Many points of interest are around Cancún for those that want to adventure outside of the main district. Excursions are easy to reach from the majority of hotels. The archaeological ruins of the lost Mayan civilization at Chichen Itzá are located 124 miles away from the island(three hours by bus). The renowned Tulum Archeological Zone is nearby and well worth a visit. Isla Mujeres is a natural and exotic sanctuary with great opportunities to snorkle and only 5 miles from the island. A visit to the ecological and archaeological park of Xcaret is a must, offering underground rivers and caves, a dip with the dolphins or an evening multimedia show recounting Mayan history. A few hours from Cancún by car, you will be at Carmen Beach, Adventure Port and also Xel-Ha, a natural aquarium where you snorkeling and swimming are the main activities. For the intrepid spirit and jungle explorer, excursions are available to the Sian Ka'an Biosphere Reserve to discover native wildlife or mangrove swamps in this semi-virgen place. If you like archaeology you can't miss visiting El Rey Archaeological Zone.

Arts& Culture

If you are a rodeo enthusiast or would like to battle a bull without the fear of being trampled upon, go on to the Plaza de Toros, where events are offered every Wednesday at 3pm. For the adventurous, travel out to the Centro Ceremonial Kohunlich, an area of immense beauty and a place to see Mayan ruins underground. On the other hand, stay indoors and visit the Interactive Aquarium Cancún, where you can feed some sharks and swim with the dolphins. You can also visit INAH Museum which is a Anthropology and History museum that changes its exhibits often. **Festivals& Celebrations**

If you happen to be in Cancún during September, you should definitely not miss the Autumn Equinox at Chichén Itzá, one of the greatest architechtural achievements from the Maya and a chance to witness one of their religious and cosmological ideas. The Day of the Dead is another festival that celebrates the dead, in which they return

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from the afterlife in order to celebrate and re-join the living. A holiday tradition that has been held for over a thousand years with decorations, parades and mariachis throughout the streets. Another day that honors the origin of the Mexican people is the Día de la Raza,where they celebrate the arrival of Columbus and the recognition of themestizo, that is, the descendants from mixed European and indigenous indians. Another highlight in September is Viva México In Cancún, a month long event that celebrates Mexico's independence. There are workshops, folkloric dance, concerts, dining, among many other events. Needless to say, September may be the best month to visit Cancún.

Sports& Activities

The whole family can enjoy some great activities and attractions that are perfect for every age. For a real lift, let go and fly a kite from the vantage point of Dolphin Beach Viewpoint. Play a round of mini-golf at the Cancún Palace Hotel's Golfito. You can also have an emotional and memorable experience by swimming with dolphins at the Xcaret Ecological Park, which will leave any traveler with something to write home about. Also try kayaking, skating or cycling along the Ciclopista in the Plaza Kukulcán. Movie lovers will be pleased to find the latest releases offered at the 10 fully equipped theaters in the plush cinema complex Cinemark, located in La Isla Shopping Center. Aquatic sports for the entire family are offered at Aquaworld located in the Flamingo Plaza.

On board the Mississippi styled river boat called The Cancún Queen, or with the Colombus Coaster Cruise, you can take in a picturesque view of the island from the coastline. The cruises leave periodically from the island. Another option for adults include the Club de Golf Cancún located on Kukulcán Boulevard.

You can also go horseback riding on the coast for those that love horses, windsail, go snorkeling into the coral reefs(specialized instructors are available for inexperienced divers), go fishing, ride a jet-ski at high speed or catch a game of jai-alai(basque ball), these are just some of the activities that are within reach of those that would like to enhance their stay in Cancun. Massage therapy is also available and can be retained from your hotel. In Cancun, there is around 200 restaurants and more than 400 stores in exclusive shopping centers nearby the hotel zone.

In the outskirts of Punta Cancún there is the natural aquarium Xel-Ha, where you can snorkel with an amazing variety of species. Towards the south is the Sian Ka´an Biosphere Reserve, where you can explore forests and a mangrove swamp. Pay attention and listen to the sound of the birds and enjoy watching the small mammals coming out to have a good look at what's going on.
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Things to Do Insights

Cancún is a natural paradise which not only has beautiful beaches with crystalline waters and fine white sand, but also boasts top attractions. Whether you explore the city on your own or go on a guided tour, you are sure to find fascinating and entertaining locations. One thing is for sure, there is something for everyone, whatever your tastes or budget.

Boulevard Kukulcán

Shopping in Cancún is made easier by the fact that most of the big shopping centers and attractions in the city are to be found on Boulevard Kukulcán. Located on the street are several shopping centers, such as Plaza Kukulcán, Plaza Caracol, Flamingo Plaza and the small traditional market Mercado Coral Negro. If you get hungry head to Señor Frog's or Crab House. You should also stop by the Interactive Aquarium where you can admire rare sea life, swim with the dolphins and even feed sharks.

Xel-Ha

In the outskirts of Punta Cancún is the natural aquarium Xel-Ha, with the impressive colors of its waters and the amazing variety of species. South of Cancún has the Reserva de la Biósfera Sian Ka'an, where you can tour the rainforest. You should also head to Zona Arqueológica El Rey which is an archaeological site that offers a fascinating look into history. Also outside of Cancún is one of the best theme parks, Xcaret, best described as an archaeological and ecological site which has a light and sound show, visits to underground streams and areas to swim with dolphins.

Mayan Riviera

Mayan Riviera is a district that runs along the coastline and goes from Puerto Morelos to Tulum. This area includes beautiful beaches as well historic sites. You should visit Puerto Morelos, a fishing village where you can try authentic local cuisine and snorkel to view their underwater reef. If you want to practice your swing head to the Iberostar Playa Paraiso Golf Club. The golf course is part of Iberostar Paraiso Maya Resort, where you can treat yourself to a relaxing day at the spa. Adventure seekers shouldn't miss Hidden Worlds Cenotes Park for spelunking and tree-top zip lining. If you get hungry stop by La Destilería, where not only can you have a meal, you can select a drink from over 150 brands of Tequila. After you eat you can visit their Tequila museum and learn more about the famous drink.

Isla Mujeres

Isla Mujeres is an island that is a 20 minutes ferry ride away from the city. On the south end of the island is the Garrafon Natural Reef Eco Park where you can snorkel, enjoy their pool and go on a shopping tour. You can also swim with the dolphins at the Dolphin Discovery Cancun. Stop at Cazuela M& J for a quick bite to eat.

Cancún offers fantastic locations where you can tour attractions on your own so you can take your time. However, there are quite a few benefits on going on a guided tour. Your guide can give you a detailed explanation about attractions, plus several tours include transportation. If you want to go on a guided tour, you have a lot of options.

Adventure Tours Aguatours(+52 998 193 3360/ http://www.aquatours.travel/) Alltournative Off-Track Adventures(+52 984 803 9999/ http://www.alltournative.com/) Rancho Loma Bonita ATV(+52 998 887 5465/ http://www.rancholomabonita.com/) Wild Tours(+52 987 872 2244/ http://www.wild-tours.com/)

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Nature Tours Grutas de Aktun Chen(+52 998 881 2745/ http://www.aktunchen.com/) Jungle Tour Cancun(+52 998 193 3360/ http://www.cancun-jungle-tour.com/)

Romantic Tours Lobster Dinner Cruise(+52 998 193 3360/ http://www.thelobsterdinner.com/) Luxury Yachts Charters(+52 998 840 6413/ http://www.yachtse.com/)

Boat Tours Operadora Samba(+52 998 892 8611/ http://www.marinacancun.com/) Paradise Catamarans(+52 984 873 5683/ http://www.paradisecatamarans.com/) Shotover Jet of Cancun(+52 800 509 5992/ http://www.shotoverjet.com.mx/) Sailing Quest(+1 800 727 5391/ http://www.aquatours.com.mx/)
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Travel Tips

Getting There

By Air

Cancun International Airport sits a mere nine miles southwest from downtown and just 15.5 kilometers(six miles) from the Hotel Zone. More than 80 flights arrive daily making it the busiest airport in Quintana Roo. It is divided into two terminals(1 and 2).

Cancun International Airport(CUN)+52 998 886 0028http://www.asur.com.mx/wwwIn/b_aeropuertos/fsCancun.html/

Terminal 2 handles all domestic and international flights from such main airlines such as:

Aeromexico(+1 800 257 6639/ http://www.aeromexico.com/) British Airways(+1 800 247 9297/ http://www.ba.com/) Continental(+1 800 525 0280/ http://www.continental.com/) Northwest(+1 800 225 2525/ http://www.nwa.com/)

Terminal 1 is considerably smaller and houses charter companies like:

Allegro(+1 877 443 7585/ http://www.allegroair.net/) Sun Country(+1 800 359 5786/ http://www.suncountry.com/)

Shuttle buses connect the two terminals and depart from the main entrances every 10 minutes. An info booth is situated in terminal 2 near the main entrance. Restaurants including a load of fast food joints and shopping outlets are also scattered about both terminals. Business facilities are available in the FBO Building, which resides next to terminal 1. Short-term lots are located adjacent to both terminals.

Upon arrival, it is highly recommended to refrain from changing your money at the airport. The exchange rates border on criminal. Wait to get into downtown or in the Hotel Zone for a much better exchange rate at one of the local banks.

From the Airport

Rental car companies are located in terminal one and include:

Alamo(+52 998 886 0448/+1 800 462 5266http://www.alamo.com/) Avis(+52 998 886 0221/+1 800 230 4898/ http://www.avis.com/) Budget(+1 800 527 0700/ http://rent.drivebudget.com/) Hertz(+1 800 654 3131/http://www.hertz.com/) National(+52 998 886 0153/http://www.nationalcar.com/) Payless(+1 800 729 5377/http://www.paylesscarrental.com/) Thrifty(+1 800 847 4389/http://www.thrifty.com/)

Shuttles and Taxis

GreenLine(http://greenlinetaxicancun.com/es/home.html) offer transportation from the airport. Hotels often have a car service that are reliable and affordable, check with your hotel to see if one is available. A great example of a Hotel Car Service is Presige.

Bus

The main bus terminal(+52 998 884 8073) is located downtown at the corners of Avenida Uxmal and Avenida Tulum and is open 24 hours a day. Though small it is divided into two halves. The east section handles first class passengers on the Autotransportes del Oriente(+52 998 884 8073), while the west section caters to second-class passengers on the Autotransportes del Caribe(+52 998 884 4804). The ADO(http://www.ado.com.mx/wadod/compra.jsp) is a public bus that goes to the airport and drops passengers off downtown.

Car

Route 180 begins at the Texas border and winds all the way through Mexico before approaching Cancún from the west. Route 307 pokes up from the south and provides easy access to the ruins of Tulum and to the ferries to Cozumel in Playa de Carmen. Kukulcán Boulevard bisects the Hotel Zone's 22.5-kilometer(14-mile) stretch of island and can be reached by two bridges from downtown.

Getting Around

Bus

Public buses run non-stop from 6a-Mid between downtown and the hotel zone. Stops are frequent and service most major hotels. Rides only cost on average six pesos(USD60 cents).

Taxi

Taxis can pick you up in front of all hotels. However, before entering, agree on a price, for the cab drivers are notorious for jacking up their rates without warning or precedence. To aid in your negotiating skills, all the hotels post taxi fare rates so as to provide a basis on what to expect to pay. Rates within the hotel zone average USD7.

Rental Cars& Mopeds

Rental cars are unnecessary if you plan on staying within the Hotel Zone and downtown. If you do drive, be forewarned that driving along the Hotel Zone can be a nightmare of speed bumps, pedestrians, and inordinately strict policemen who have a reputation for targeting tourists. Downtown, with its collection of traffic circles, poorly marked one-way streets, and potholes, is even worse. If you do rent be sure to purchase Mexican car rental insurance. Rentals average USD 25 a day. Due to the high accident rate, however, they are not recommended, especially since no insurance is offered.

Ferry

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Boats to Isla Mujeres leave every half hour(7:30a-7:30p) just north of Cancún from Puerto Juarez. Rides last 30 minutes and cost USD4. Caribbean Express(+52 998 877 0254) and Caribbean Miss(+52 998 877 0253) both offer air conditioning and bar service. Ferries to Cozumel(+52 998 872 1722) depart from Playa de Carmen, 67.5 kilometers(42 miles) south, every hour from 5a-11p and last approximately 45 minutes.

Tour Bus

For visits to the Mayan ruins in Tulum(130 kilometers/81 miles) or Chichen Itzá(203 kilometers/126 miles) consider a tour bus. Mayaland Tours(+52 998 887 2450) enjoys an outstanding reputation and features air-conditioned buses.
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Fun Facts

1. Before the city acquired its current name, Cancún was called Ekab, meaning"Black Earth". Cancún is the Mayan word for"nest of serpents" or"snake pit".

2. Interesting fact: Mayan ruins can be found in Cancun's hotel zone. The archaeological site of El Rey is the largest site in the hotel zone, and it is located near Hilton Cancun Beach& Golf Resort.

3. Over 1/3 of Mexico's tourism revenue is generated by Cancun. Each year, hundreds of thousands of travelers visit Cancun each year to enjoy the great weather and beautiful, white-sand beaches.

4. Cancun's average annual temperature is 80 degrees and there are over 240 sunny days.

5. Cancun's beaches have white sand, which is made from crushed coral and is not hot to the touch.

6. Destination weddings are very popular in Cancun& the Riviera Maya region. There are approximately 46,000 weddings in the area, annually.

7. Cancun's airport is the 2nd busiest in Mexico(only Mexico City's airport is busier) and it has the most international traffic of any airport in Latin America. In 2009, over 11 million foreign travelers arrived in Cancun, by air. Cancun's airport has 2 runways that can be used simultaneously and it's control tower is the tallest in Latin America(the 18th tallest in the world).

8. Fun fact: Cancun first appeared on maps in the 18th century and there were only 3 residents when development of the resort area started in January 1970. Today, there are over 700,000 residents and over 24,000 hotel rooms, in Cancun's hotel zone.

9. In early 2010, there was a major beach restoration project that included the rebuilding of the beaches in Cancun, Playa del Carmen, and Cozumel. The Mexican government invested$71 million US Dollars in the project, which restored 11 kilometers of the area's beaches.

10. 1.3 billion gallons(6.1 cubic meters) of sand were used to rebuild the beaches, during the 2010 beach restoration project.

11. Weird fact: Three of the world's longest underwater cave systems are located in the Riviera Maya. Ox Bel Ha is 146.7 kilometers, Nohock Na Choch is 61 kilometers, and Dos Ojos is 57.7 kilometers.

12. Scuba divers flock to Cancun, and the surrounding area, for the opportunity to dive the Great Maya Barrier Reef, which is the second largest coral reef in the world. Only Australia's Great Barrier Reef is larger.

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