



**nileGUIDE**

ALL YOU NEED TO PLAN YOUR PERFECT TRIP



Jennifer Williams

# Cancun's Hidden Gems

## **Cancun, 5 Days**

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# Guide Description



**AUTHOR NOTE:** My Cancun's Hidden Gems guide includes a remote beach, 2 small Mayan ruins sites, and 2 great restaurants that are perfect for a romantic night out, a special occasion, or just enjoying a wonderful meal.

Avoid crowds by visiting these lesser-known places in Cancun.

# Itinerary Overview

things to do  
restaurants  
hotels  
nightlife

## Day 1 - Cancun



### Zona Arqueológica El Rey

Mayan ruins for those that don't have the time to visit Chichen Itza or Tulum.



### L'Escargot

French restaurant in downtown Cancun. Delicious food and great service make this a wonderful place for a special occasion.

## Day 2 - Cancun



### Palapa Belga (La)

A Romantic Setting

## Day 3 - Cancun



### Isla Contoy

Also known as the Island of the Birds

# Day 1 - Cancun

QUICK NOTE

**contact:**

tel: +52 998 881 2745  
<http://dti.inah.gob.mx/index.php>

**location:**

Boulevard Kukulcán Km 18  
Cancún 77500

**hours:**

Daily 8a-5p

## 1 Zona Arqueológica El Rey

**DESCRIPTION:** This archaeological site is within the Cancun resort area and is well worth a visit if a day trip to the larger sites of Tulum or Chichen Itza isn't in your plans. Here you can appreciate the vestiges of one of the most interesting ancient civilizations of the Americas: The Mayans. These ruins are a window into the history of Mexico, and are Cancún's largest archaeological site. This was an ancient city that reached its splendor between the years 1250 and 1521 AD. Tours can be arranged through Cancún hotels and travel agencies. You'll hear an explanation of the structures and their historical significance in English, Spanish, French, German, Italian or Portuguese. You can get here by taxi or local bus. © wcities.com



wcities

**contact:**

tel: (998) 887-6337  
<http://www.lescargot.com.mx>

**location:**

Calle Piña #27, SM-25  
Cancun Quintana Roo 77500

**hours:**

Breakfast: Monday-Friday 8:00am-12:30pm &  
Dinner: Monday-Saturday 6:30pm-11:30pm

## 2 L'Escargot

**OUR LOCAL EXPERT SAYS:**

Call ahead to reserve a table, as this restaurant is very small. Also, the terrace is a very romantic setting. If you are celebrating an anniversary, or just want to have a romantic evening, request a table on the terrace.

**DESCRIPTION:** L'Escargot is one of Cancun's hidden treasures. This small, family-owned & operated restaurant serves up some of the most incredible food you'll find in Cancun. The menu is French-inspired but, in addition to Foie Gras, Patés, and, of course, L'escargot, diners will also find beef, duck, lamb, and fish dishes. The portions are generous and the food is absolutely delicious. The staff speaks Spanish, English, & French. There is seating on the terrace and inside the restaurant. The indoor dining area has air conditioning. There is live music on Wednesdays and Thursdays. At this time, breakfast is NOT being served. Breakfast service will resume in September. © NileGuide

# Day 2 - Cancun

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**contact:**

tel: +52 998 883 5454

<http://palapabelga.com/>

**location:**

Calle Quetzal Number 13

Cancun QR 77500

**hours:**

Daily 7a

## Palapa Belga (La)

**DESCRIPTION:** Located in a beautiful romantic setting overlooking the beach and the lagoon, La Palapa Belga offers a wonderful dining experience. And if you like French and Belgian cuisine, then this is your place to be. Among Cancun's most famed restaurants, La Palapa is owned and managed by the renowned chef Oliver, who cooks up some really delicious salmons, steaks, seafood and a lot of other French and Belgian specialties. The French onion soup offered here is a must-try. The restaurant is well-illuminated and offers an intimate and cozy seating arrangement overlooking the sea from all the sides. It almost gives you a feeling of dining aboard a ship which makes it all the more pleasant. © wcities.com

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# Day 3 - Cancun

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QUICK NOTE

**contact:**

tel: +52 998 287 3671 (Call for details)

<http://www.islacontoy.org/aboutus.htm>

**location:**

Puerto de embarque de Isla Mujeres y Puerto Juárez  
Cancún QR 77500

## 1 Isla Contoy

**DESCRIPTION:** This incredible reserve is also known as the Island of the Birds. Covering an area of 230 hectares, it is the refuge for about 100 species of birds. Contoy means "pelican" in Mayan, and this is the most abundant species. They live together with other fauna such as turtles, reptiles and small mammals. Contoy Island is surrounded by the waters of the Caribbean and the Gulf of Mexico. There is a small museum and a five-story lighthouse with a beautiful view. To preserve the balance of the reserve, only a limited number of visitors are allowed in at any one time. © wcities.com

location:  
Cancun Quintana Roo

## 1 Isla Blanca

### OUR LOCAL EXPERT SAYS:

Avoid visiting Isla Blanca on Sundays. It's very crowded on that day. Visit during the week and you'll feel like you have your own private beach. If there are some people on the beach nearest the parking, just walk to the north and you'll find yourself all alone with the sea and sand. There is a dirt road for part of the drive out to Isla Blanca. You can get there in a rental car, but it will be slow going. Be patient. It's worth the trip. There is limited parking. You may have to park on the side of the road. Be careful not to get stuck in the sand. There is no place to go to call a tow-truck, in this remote area. Pack food and beverages. Isla Blanca has only one restaurant...and I use that term loosely. Once you see it, it's doubtful you'll want to dine there. Be safe and bring your own water and munchies.

**DESCRIPTION:** Isla Blanca (literally means "white beach") is a beautiful stretch of beach, located approximately 12.5 miles north of downtown Cancun. The name is a bit misleading, since Isla Blanca is not really an island. Instead it is a narrow peninsula, with the sea on one side and Chakmochuk Lagoon on the other.

This area is excellent for fly-fishing. Several tour operators run fly-fishing excursions throughout the year. Kiteboarding is the latest craze in the Cancun area. Daredevils wishing to give the sport a try can visit Ikarus Kiteboarding School, located very close to Isla Blanca.

The turquoise waters and white sand, combined with the lack of people, make this pristine beach a fantastic getaway for a day.

There are no organized tours to the beaches of Isla Blanca. You will have to rent a car or hire a taxi for a few hours, if you wish to visit this area.

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editor

**contact:**

<http://www.partner.viator.com/en/6793/tours/Cancun/Captain-Hook-Cruise-in-Cancun/d631-2895CANCAPHOOK>

**location:**

Cancun Quintana Roo

**2 Captain Hook Cruise in Cancun**

**DESCRIPTION:** Become a pirate of the Caribbean on this fun-filled voyage where you will go back in time and experience a pirate's attack while sailing through the beautiful waters of the Nichupte lagoon. All this while enjoying a pirate's dinner and the open bar! A fun adventure for all ages!

Come aboard an authentic 18th century replica of a Spanish Galleon and step back in time to the pirate era! As you cruise through the beautiful waters of the Nichupte lagoon in Cancun, the drinks will start flowing and you will be entertained with games and dancing before feasting on a hearty meal of either steak or lobster surf and turf. During the cruise, you will witness a pirate attack where the pirates will engage in a sword fight! At time of booking you must choose which meal option you wish to have, either STEAK or SURF AND TURF. © Viator



viator



# Cancun Snapshot

## Local Info

### Introduction

Brilliant white sand and a Caribbean sea the color of blue Curaçao-- believe the brochures about Cancún. No matter how high-rise this city gets with its five-star mega resorts and mega malls, it's the beach that put it on the map-- and no tempest of nature has been able to sweep it away completely. Get up from your poolside lounge and discover why millions flock to this sun-drenched destination-- turtle-spotting off the Isla Mujeres, discovering Chichen Itza's iconic Mayan pyramid and swaying to salsa in El Centro's tequila-slammng clubs.

### Things to Do

While it's tempting just to laze on **Playa Langosta's** powdery sand, there's life beyond Cancún's beaches. Scuba dive or snorkel off the islands of **Isla de Mujeres** and **Cozumel**, both with quieter waters than Cancún. The enigmatic culture of the Mayans comes alive at nearby **Tulum's** seafront ruins. Or take a day trip to the pyramid temples of **Chichen Itza** and jungly **Uxmal**. Kids in tow? Let them swim with dolphins in **Xel-Ha** eco theme park's gigantic natural aquarium.

### Shopping

Cancún's glossy malls, like **Plaza Las Américas** and **Plaza Kukulcán**, have an American flavor with their brand-name stores, cinemas and food courts. **La Isla Shopping Village**, though, has canals and an aquarium. For a more Mexican experience, root around **Mercado 23** for crafts, fresh produce and authentic street chow. Pick up unique gifts from handmade sombreros to hammocks orhuaraches(sandals) and artisan silver jewelry in downtown **El Centro**. Many supermarkets sell tequila.

### Nightlife and Entertainment

Cancún is the party resort in Mexico. Drinking games, DJs pumping tunes until daybreak, pool parties-- find it all in happening hotspots like **Señor Frogs** in the **Party Center**, halfway along Cancún's hotel strip. In **El Centro's** salsa clubs playing

bouncy cumbia music, sip tequila in a refreshing margarita or slam it with lime and salt. There's a more mellow bohemian vibe in beachside **Tulum**, while **Playa del Carmen's** funky **Playa Mimitas** often attracts DJs and bands.

### Restaurants and Dining

Tuck into sizzling fajitas in party-mad Tex-Mex joints or fresh shrimp and lobster while being serenaded by mariachis in the seafront restaurants in the **Zona Hotelera**. Food is cheaper and the atmosphere more authentically Mexican in **El Centro**, where locals eat incendiary tacos, enchiladas with chocolate-chilimole sauce and succulent tamales(corn dough studded with meat or beans, wrapped in a banana leaf or corn husk). For an inexpensive snack, graze the food stalls in **Parque Las Palapas**.

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## History

The Riviera 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 Archaeological 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

## Cancun Snapshot continued

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.

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, the gran turismo and categoría 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, laundrette 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 and gran 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 pre-Hispanic past, a vanguard culture, unlimited

## Cancun Snapshot continued

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 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 Cancun 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 Cancun, Rainforest Café, and Hard Rock Café Cancun.

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 Cancun 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 Cancun, 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 are 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, Cancun 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 Cancun 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 Cancun 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 Itza 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 snorkel 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 Cancun 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

## Cancun Snapshot continued

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 architectural 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 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 the mestizo, 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 Columbus 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.

©

### 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

## Cancun Snapshot continued

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/>)

**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

### Planning a Trip

### Getting There

**By Plane**-- If this is not your first trip to Cancún, you'll notice that the **airport's**(tel. **998/848-7200**) facilities and services continue to expand. All flights to and from the U.S. now go through the new Terminal 3, which has money-exchange services, duty-free shops, restaurants, medical services, and even an express spa. **AeroMéxico**(tel. **866/275-6419** in the U.S., or 01-800/021-4000 in Mexico; [www.aeromexico.com](http://www.aeromexico.com)) operates connecting service to Cancún through Mexico City. **Mexicana**(tel. **800/531-7921** in the U.S., 01-800/366-5400 in Mexico, or 998/881-9090; [www.mexicana.com](http://www.mexicana.com)) runs

connecting flights to Cancún through Miami or Mexico City. In addition to these carriers, many **charter** companies-- such as Apple Vacations and Funjet-- travel to Cancún; these package tours make up as much as half of arrivals by U.S. visitors.

Regional carrier **Click Mexicana**, a Mexicana affiliate(tel. **01-800/112-5425** in Mexico; [www.click.com.mx](http://www.click.com.mx)), flies from Havana, Cuba, Chetumal, Cozumel, Mexico City, Mérida, and other points within Mexico. You'll want to confirm departure times for flights to the U.S. **Aviacsa**(tel. **01-800/711-6733** in Mexico; [www.aviacsa.com](http://www.aviacsa.com)), **Interjet**(tel. **01-800/01-12345** in Mexico; [www.interjet.com.mx](http://www.interjet.com.mx)), and **Volaris**(tel. **01-800/7865-2747** in Mexico; [www.volaris.com.mx](http://www.volaris.com.mx)) are three other regional carriers that fly to Cancún from Mexico City.

The following major international carriers serve Cancún: **Alaska**(tel. 800/426-0333; [www.alaskaair.com](http://www.alaskaair.com)), **American**(tel. 800/433-7300; [www.aa.com](http://www.aa.com)), **Continental**(tel. 800/231-0856; [www.continental.com](http://www.continental.com)), **Delta**(tel. 800/221-1212; [www.delta.com](http://www.delta.com)), **Frontier**(tel. 800/432-1359; [www.frontierairlines.com](http://www.frontierairlines.com)), **JetBlue**(tel. **800/538-2583**; [www.jetblue.com](http://www.jetblue.com)), **Northwest**(tel. 800/225-2525; [www.nwa.com](http://www.nwa.com)), **United**(tel. 800/241-6522; [www.ual.com](http://www.ual.com)), and **US Airways**(tel. 800/428-4322; [www.usairways.com](http://www.usairways.com)).

Most major car-rental firms have outlets at the airport, so if you're renting a car, consider picking it up and dropping it off at the airport, to save on airport-transportation costs. Another way to save money is to arrange for the rental before you leave home. If you wait until you arrive, the daily cost will be around \$50 to \$75 for a compact vehicle. Major agencies include **Alamo**(tel. 800/462-5266 in the U.S., or 998/886-0448; [www.alamo.com](http://www.alamo.com)), **Avis**(tel. 800/331-1212 in the U.S., or 998/886-0221; [www.avis.com](http://www.avis.com)), **Budget**(tel. 800/527-0700 in the U.S., or 998/886-0417; fax 998/884-4812; [www.budget.com](http://www.budget.com)), **Dollar**(tel. 800/800-3665 in the U.S., or 998/886-2300; [www.dollar.com](http://www.dollar.com)), **Hertz**(tel. 800/654-3131 in the U.S. and

Canada, or 998/884-1326; [www.hertz.com](http://www.hertz.com)), **National**(tel. 800/227-7368 in the U.S., or 998/886-0153; [www.nationalcar.com](http://www.nationalcar.com)), and **Thrifty**(tel. 800/847-4389; [www.thrifty.com](http://www.thrifty.com)). The Zona Hotelera(Hotel Zone) lies 10km(6 1/4 miles)-- a 20-minute drive-- from the airport along wide, well-paved roads.

The rate for a **private taxi** from the airport is \$58 to Ciudad Cancún(downtown) or the Hotel Zone. The return trip with an airport taxi is discounted by 50%. Green Line and Gray Line **van shuttles** run from the airport into town approximately every 20 minutes. Buy tickets, which cost about \$14, from the booth to the far right as you exit the airport terminal. These services accept U.S. dollars, though you'll get a more favorable rate if you pay in pesos. There's **local bus** transportation(45 pesos) from the airport to Ciudad Cancún. From there, you can take another bus for less than a dollar to Puerto Juárez, where passenger ferries leave to Isla Mujeres regularly. There is no shuttle service returning to the airport from Ciudad Cancún or the Hotel Zone, so you'll have to take a taxi, but the rate will be much less than for the trip from the airport. (Only federally chartered taxis may take fares from the airport, but any taxi may bring passengers to the airport.) Ask at your hotel what the fare should be, but expect to pay about half what you paid from the airport to your hotel.

**By Car**-- From Mérida or Campeche, take **Highway 180** east to Cancún. This is mostly a winding, two-lane road that branches off into the express **toll road 180D** between Izamal and Nuevo Xcan. Nuevo Xcan is approximately 40km(25 miles) from Cancún. Mérida is about 320km(198 miles) away.

**By Bus**-- Cancún's **ADO bus terminal**(tel. **01-800/702-8000** in Mexico or 998/884-4352) is in downtown Ciudad Cancún at the intersection of avenidas Tulum and Uxmal. All out-of-town buses arrive here. Buses run to Playa del Carmen, Tulum, Chichén Itzá, other nearby beach and archaeological zones, and other points within Mexico.

### The Best Websites for Cancún

## Cancun Snapshot continued

### All About Cancún:

[www.cancunmx.com](http://www.cancunmx.com)-- This site is a good place to start planning. Their database, called "The Online Experts," answers many of the most common questions. It's slow but current, with input from lots of recent travelers to the region.

### Cancún Convention & Visitors Bureau:

[www.cancun.travel](http://www.cancun.travel)-- The official site of the Cancún Convention & Visitors Bureau lists excellent information on events and attractions. Its hotel guide is one of the most complete available, and it has an active message board of recent visitors to Cancún.

### Cancún Online:

[www.cancun.com](http://www.cancun.com)-- This comprehensive guide has lots of information about things to do and see in Cancún, though most details come from paying advertisers.

The site lets you reserve package trips, accommodations, activities, and tee times.

### Cancún Travel Guide:

[www.go2cancun.com](http://www.go2cancun.com)-- These online information specialists are also an excellent resource for Cancún rentals, hotels, and attractions. Note that this site lists only paying advertisers, which means you'll find most of the major players here.

### Visitor Information

The **Cancún Municipal Tourism Office** is downtown at the Palacio Municipal (City Hall), on Avenida Tulum between avenidas Uxmal and Cobá (tel. **998/887-3379**). It's open Monday through Friday from 9am to 7pm. The office lists hotels and their rates, as well as ferry schedules. For information prior to your arrival in Cancún, visit the Convention Bureau's website, [www.cancun.travel](http://www.cancun.travel). The state tourism website is in Spanish, at [www.qroo.gob.mx](http://www.qroo.gob.mx). Pick up copies of the free booklet **Cancún Tips** ([www.cancuntips.com.mx](http://www.cancuntips.com.mx)), and a seasonal tabloid of the same name.

### City Layout

There are really two Cancúns: **Ciudad Cancún (Cancún City)** and **Isla Cancún (Cancún Island)**. The former, on the mainland, is the original downtown area, where most of the local population lives. It's home to traditional restaurants, shops, and less expensive hotels, as well as pharmacies, dentists, automotive shops, banks, travel and airline agencies, and car-rental firms-- all within an area about 9 square blocks. The city's main thoroughfare

is **Avenida Tulum**. Heading south, Avenida Tulum becomes the highway to the airport and to Tulum and Chetumal; heading north, it intersects the highway to Mérida and the road to Puerto Juárez and the Isla Mujeres ferries.

Isla Cancún is a sandy strip 22km (14 miles) long, shaped like a 7. It's home to the famed **Zona Hotelera**, or Hotel Zone (also called the Zona Turística, or Tourist Zone), connected to the mainland by the Playa Linda Bridge at the north end and the Punta Nizuc Bridge at the southern end. Between the two areas lies Laguna Nichupté. Avenida Cobá from Cancún City becomes Bulevar Kukulkán, the island's main traffic artery. Cancún's international airport is just inland from the south end of the island.

**Finding an Address**-- Cancún City's street-numbering system is a holdover from its early days. Addresses are still given by the number of the building lot and by themanzana (block) or supermanzana (group of blocks). The city is relatively compact, and the downtown commercial section is easy to cover on foot.

On the island, addresses are given by kilometer number on Bulevar Kukulkán or by reference to some well-known location. In Cancún, streets are named after famous Maya cities. Boulevards are named for nearby archaeological sites, Chichén Itzá, Tulum, and Uxmal.

### Getting Around

**By Taxi**-- Taxi prices in Cancún are clearly set by zone, although keeping track of what's in which zone can take some doing. The minimum fare within the Hotel Zone is \$8 per ride, making it one of the most expensive taxi areas in Mexico. In addition, taxis operating in the Hotel Zone feel perfectly justified in having a discriminatory pricing structure: Local residents pay about half of what tourists pay, and prices for guests at higher-priced hotels are about double those for budget hotel guests-- these are all established by the taxi union. Rates should be posted outside your hotel; if you have a question, all drivers are required to have an official rate card in their taxis, though it's generally in Spanish. Taxi

drivers will accept dollars, though at a less favorable rate than pesos.

Within the downtown area, the cost is about \$3 per cab ride (not per person); within any other zone, it's \$6. Traveling between two zones will also cost \$6, and if you cross two zones, that'll cost \$8. Settle on a price in advance, or check at your hotel. Trips to the airport from most zones cost about \$30. Taxis can also be rented for \$25 per hour for travel around the city and Hotel Zone, but this rate can generally be negotiated down to about \$20. If you want to hire a taxi to take you to Chichén Itzá or along the Riviera Maya, expect to pay about \$35 per hour-- many taxi drivers feel that they are also providing guide services.

**By Bus**-- Bus travel within Cancún continues to improve and is increasingly popular. In town, almost everything lies within walking distance. **Ruta 1** and **Ruta 2 (HOTELES)** city buses travel frequently from Puerto Juárez on the mainland to the beaches along Avenida Tulum (the main street) and all the way to Punta Nizuc at the far end of the Hotel Zone on Isla Cancún. **Ruta 8** buses go to Puerto Juárez/Punta Sam for ferries to Isla Mujeres. They stop on the east side of Avenida Tulum. All these city buses run between 6am and 10pm daily. Buses also go up and down the main strip of the Hotel Zone day and night. Public buses have the fare painted on the front; at press time, the fare was 6.50 pesos.

**By Scooter**-- Scooters are a convenient but dangerous way to cruise through the very congested traffic. Rentals start at about \$30 for a day, not including insurance, and a credit card voucher is required as security. You should receive a crash helmet (it's the law) and instructions on how to lock the wheels when you park. Read the fine print on the back of the rental agreement regarding liability for repairs or replacement in case of accident, theft, or vandalism.

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### Fun Facts

**Cancún State:** Quintana Roo **Country:** Mexico

## Cancun Snapshot continued

### Cancún by the Numbers:

Population: 573,000(City); 880,000(Metropolitan) Average January temperature: 20°C/ 68°F Average July temperature: 24°C/ 75°F Country Code: +52 Area Code: 98 Amount of sand that was transported to Cancun to restore the beaches after hurricane Wilma in 2005: 95,000,000 cubic meters(3,354,893,338 cubic feet). Hotel rooms in Cancún: over 24,000

### Quick Facts:

Important Industries: Tourism Time Zone: Central(GMT-6) Electricity: 110 volts, the same as in the U.S. Climate: Subtropical

### Did You Know?

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". An interesting fact about Cancun is that you can find

Mayan ruins in the hotel zone. The archaeological site of El Rey is the largest site and it is located near Hilton Cancun.

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. Cancun's average annual temperature is 80 degrees and there are over 240 sunny days. The white sand is made from crushed coral and is not hot to the touch.

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

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).

Some fun facts about Cancun are that the city 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.

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.

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.

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## Weather

Statistics	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Temperature C												
Average High	29	31	33	34	33	34	34	34	33	31	30	28
Average Mean	23	24	26	27	28	29	28	28	28	26	25	23
Average Low	17	18	19	21	23	24	23	23	23	22	20	19
Temperature F												
Average High	81	82	84	85	88	89	90	90	89	87	84	82
Average Mean	74	75	78	80	82	84	84	84	84	81	78	76
Average Low	67	68	71	73	77	78	78	77	76	74	72	69
Rainy Days	9	4	4	4	6	12	8	7	12	10	8	8
Rain Fall (cm)	1.8	0.7	1.0	1.6	2.3	4.6	6.2	6.6	4.8	3.7	1.6	0.9
Rain Fall (in)	0.7	0.3	0.4	0.6	0.9	1.8	2.4	2.6	1.9	1.5	0.6	0.3

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