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Insider's Guide to Riviera Maya

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Travel Advisor

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image courtesy of Maroma, A Belmond Hotel

Riviera Maya is a stretch of white-sand coastline along Mexico's Yucatán Peninsula that's known for beautiful beaches, luxury resorts and a relaxed atmosphere. This destination

attracts many travelers, including families, couples and solo adventurers. Visitors can explore ancient Mayan ruins, swim in natural cenotes or chill at upscale beach clubs. The area also offers lively nightlife and excellent dining options. With warm weather year-round, there's always something to do, whether you're looking for outdoor adventure or quiet relaxation.

Below, my curated guide to Riviera Maya offers an overview of where to stay and what to do in the region. If you're ready to book your next escape, connect with me and I can create custom itineraries tailored to your unique preferences and budget.

Need to know



Image courtesy of Rosewood Mayakoba

- **Currency:** Though the official currency is the Mexican peso (MXN), US dollars are accepted in many tourist establishments.
- **Languages:** Spanish is the official language, but most hotel and restaurant staff speak English in Riviera Maya.
- **Airports:** Cancún International Airport (CUN) is the area's central air travel hub. JetBlue also offers non-stop service from major US cities to the newly opened Tulum International Airport (TQO).

- **Transportation:** Getting a ride outside Cancún airport can be chaotic, so it's best to reserve ahead. Options include hotel shuttles, large passenger vans called *colectivos* and private taxis.
- **Best time to visit:** Riviera Maya has beautiful weather year-round, but November through May offers sunny days and mild nights. Hotel rates are lower in the hot and humid summer months.
- **Ideal length of stay:** Three to seven days is perfect, though, of course, vacationers who can spend more than a week in Riviera Maya won't run out of options for relaxation or exploration.
- **Signature dishes:** Foodie favorites include cochinita pibil (slow-roasted pork wrapped in banana leaves), panuchos (fried tortillas stuffed with refried beans and topped with shredded chicken and greens), fresh ceviche and many delicious fish preparations.
- **Key phrases:** "Buenos días" (Good morning), "Gracias" (Thank you), "Adiós" (Goodbye), "Cuánto cuesta?" (How much does it cost?)
- **What to wear:** Pack light, comfortable clothing for hot days and warm evenings. You'll also want swimwear, activewear for outdoor excursions and smart-casual resort wear for eateries with dress codes.

Where to stay



Image courtesy of Be Tulum

Riviera Maya is a long stretch of coastline punctuated by towns and resort enclaves. Here are key areas to visit, each with a distinct personality and offering a variety of properties, including top luxe hotels (plus some honorable mentions), stylish boutique gems and all-inclusive resorts.

Cancún: Known for its lively beaches, luxury resorts and nightlife, this city offers easy access to the airport and nearby islands.

Playa Mujeres: Upscale, serene and known for pristine beaches, this area north of Cancún has several luxury resorts and a golf course.

Kanai: Exclusive and tranquil, this luxury enclave between Cancún and Playa del Carmen has a clutch of high-end resorts and pristine beaches.

Mayakoba: Known for its eco-friendly, upscale resorts, this stretch of lush mangroves, lagoons, and beaches is south of Cancún.

Playa del Carmen: This coastal resort town features bustling nightlife, boutique shopping on Quinta Avenida, beach clubs and diverse dining.

Tulum: Beachy, bohemian vibes at eco-resorts, wellness retreats, boutique shopping and iconic beachfront ruins.

Top picks

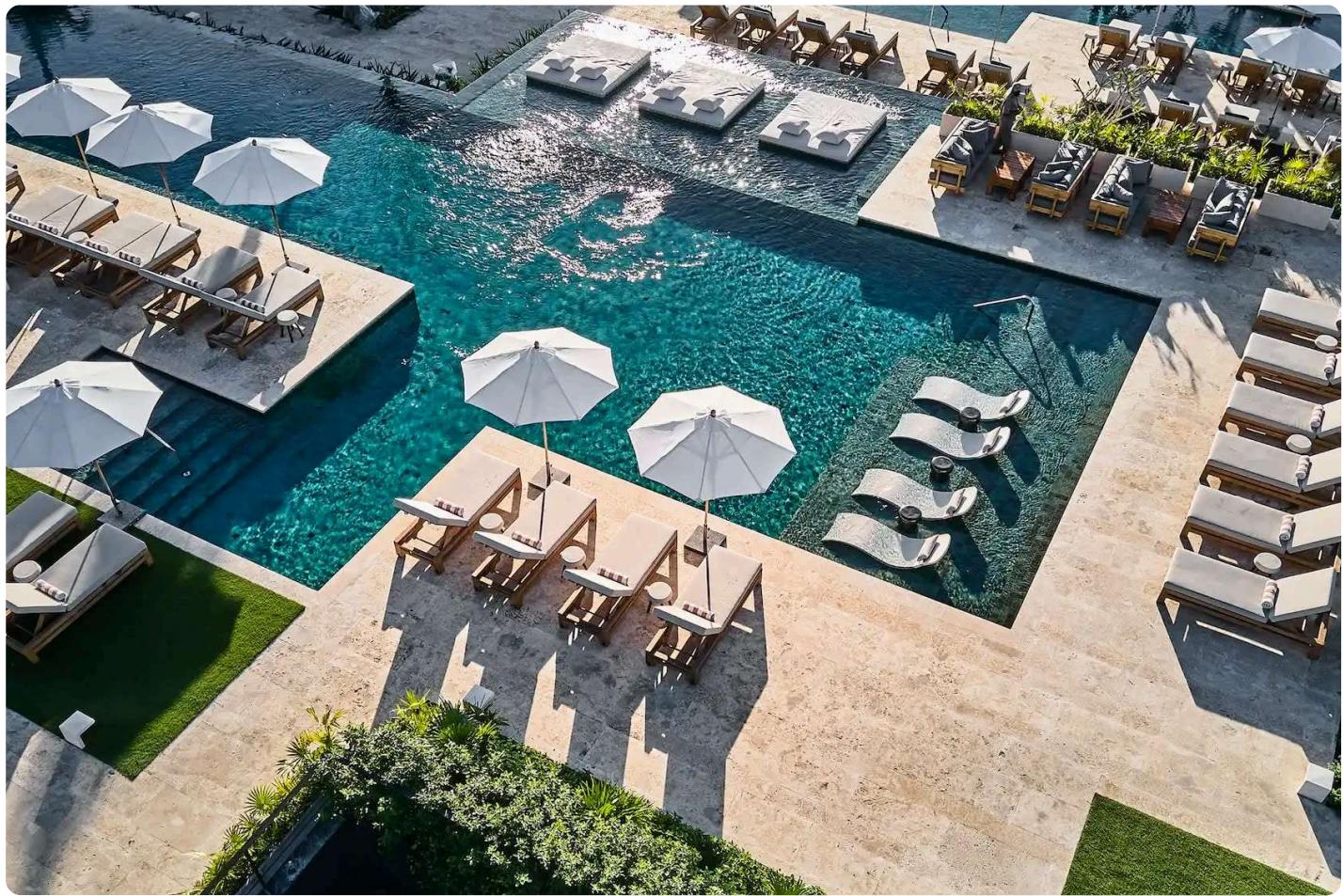


Image courtesy Etéreo, Auberge Resorts Collection

Rosewood Mayakoba: The best of the best, this ultra-luxury escape offers private suites and villas with plunge pools. Enjoy dedicated butler service surrounded by lush mangroves and lagoons.

- **Fora Perks** include a welcome amenity, daily breakfast credit and upgrade whenever possible.

Etéreo, Auberge Resorts Collection: An boho-chic Playa del Carmen resort with a 300-meter long white-sand beach and modern Mayan architecture. Mouthwatering food options and impeccable service round out the experience.

- **Fora Reserve Perks** include daily breakfast credit, \$100 resort credit and an upgrade and extended check-in/check-out whenever possible.

Honorable mentions



Image courtesy of NIZUC Resort & Spa

NIZUC Resort and Spa: Discover a sophisticated and secluded escape for couples and families—the epitome of understated, stylish luxury.

- **Fora Reserve Perks** include a hydrotherapy spa experience, welcome amenity, daily breakfast, an upgrade and extended check-in/check-out whenever possible.

Andaz Mayakoba: Affordable luxury resort with colorful decor, local art and relaxed beachfront vibes.

- **Fora Perks** include a property credit, welcome amenity, breakfast daily, an upgrade and extended check-in/check-out whenever possible.

Be Tulum: Part of Nômade Hotels, this beach and spa resort is known for its focus on sustainability and mindfulness, which are fully realized in the wellness offerings.

- **Fora Reserve Perks** include a welcome amenity, a bottle of mezcal, daily breakfast for two, 10% off food and beverage rates, an upgrade and extended check-in/check-out whenever possible.

Boutique hotels



Image courtesy of Maroma, A Belmond Hotel, Riviera Maya

Chable Maroma: A wellness-focused boutique luxury hideaway offering private plunge pools, temazcal ceremonies and organic dining.

- **Fora Reserve Perks** include a \$100 hotel credit, breakfast daily, an upgrade and extended check-in/check-out whenever possible.

Maroma, A Belmond Hotel, Riviera Maya: At this boutique property, expect Belmond's signature unmatched service and elevated aesthetics, plus incredible dining experiences that end with beachside sundowners and live music.

- **Fora Perks** include a \$90 hotel credit, welcome amenities, breakfast daily and an upgrade whenever possible.

Hotel Esencia: A discreet yet luxurious boutique hotel in Tulum, known for its organic spa and locally sourced cuisine.

- **Fora Perks** include a \$100 hotel / resort credit, a bottle of wine, \$60 daily breakfast credit, an upgrade and extended check-in/check-out whenever possible.

All-inclusives



Image courtesy of Secrets Moxche, Playa del Carmen

Secrets Moxche, Playa del Carmen: A stylish all-inclusive resort complete with gourmet dining options, a rooftop lounge and lots of social opportunities.

- **Fora Perks** include a property credit, welcome amenity, breakfast daily, plus an upgrade and extended check-in/check-out whenever possible.

Grand Velas Riviera Maya: All-inclusive experience with oceanfront suites, gourmet dining and split adults-only and family-friendly sections. The holistic spa and plentiful water activities are the cherries on top.

- **Fora Perks** include a \$50 spa credit, complimentary hydrotherapy water journey, breakfast daily, an upgrade and extended check-in/out whenever possible.

History and culture



Image courtesy of Hotel Esencia

Riviera Maya has a rich history that spans thousands of years. It begins with the ancient Mayan era, when cities like Tulum and Coba were vital trade centers. Cliffside Tulum remains famous for its well-preserved ruins and stunning views. The Mayans built impressive structures, developed an advanced calendar, and held deep spiritual beliefs. They revered cenotes — natural sinkholes believed to be gateways to the underworld.

Over time, the region evolved under the influence of the Spanish conquest. Spanish colonization introduced new cultural elements but also led to the decline of many native traditions. Despite this, the spirit of the Mayan people endures. You can still see it in local dishes, customs and the community's deep connection to the land.

Now, travelers can dive into local culture by exploring archaeological sites, participating in traditional ceremonies, and enjoying vibrant music, dance and cuisine.

Activities



Many Riviera Maya resorts have enough activities to entertain you for weeks, but it's a good idea to explore beyond your hotel, too. This region has something for everyone: adventure, nature, relaxation and culinary experiences.

- Swim in a **cenote**. These natural freshwater sinkholes are often located in the jungle, offering an incredible nature experience that's hard to find anywhere else.
- Visit **Chichén Itzá**, one of the New Seven Wonders of the World, to see impressive pyramids and intricate stone carvings.

- Don't miss the **Mayan ruins** of Tulum and Coba. The ruins in Tulum offer spectacular views, while the less-crowded Coba ruins offer a chance to climb an ancient pyramid.
- Spend a day **shopping and eating your way through Tulum**, with rows of chic eateries and fun boutiques.
- Go snorkeling in the **Great Mesoamerican Reef**, the second-largest coral reef system in the world. Riviera Maya also has an **underwater sculpture garden** that is perfect for snorkeling and diving.
- **Kitesurfing** is a popular activity in this perpetually windy area.
- Visit **Xcaret Park**, an eco-archaeological park where you can swim in underground rivers, watch traditional performances or visit a butterfly pavilion.
- Head to **Isla Mujeres** by ferry for snorkeling and a day of island exploration in a relaxed, tropical setting.

Add-on destinations



Riviera Maya is usually a standalone destination. But if you have more than a week to spend in Mexico, don't miss these nearby spots.

- **Mexico City (2-hour flight):** Begin or end your Mexico escape in this vibrant mega-metropolis bursting with world-class museums and top-notch dining.
- **Bacalar (a 2.5-hour drive):** Extend your vacation at the "Lake of Seven Colors," which features a crystal-clear lagoon perfect for kayaking and swimming.
- **Isla Holbox (1.5 hours drive & ferry):** Spend a day or two in this car-free paradise where you can snorkel, kite surf and see bioluminescent waters at night.
- **Merida (3.5-hour drive):** Combine your trip to Riviera Maya with a stay in this vibrant colonial city that blends Mayan heritage and Spanish architecture. Enjoy lively plazas, traditional Yucatecan cuisine and cultural events.

For customized recommendations and expert planning, reach out to me to begin your Riviera Maya escape.

Get in touch with Gregory

Reach out for travel inspiration, hotel bookings or customized itineraries.

*Email Address

*First Name

*Last Name

Please provide some details about your trip.

You can expect a response from Gregory within 1-2 business days. You'll also be subscribed to our traveler newsletter (you can unsubscribe at any time).

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