

## Destination Review: Cancun

When you think about a vacation in Cancun, different people conjure up different images. I often think of Cancun as college spring break party central. Which is one valid description of Cancun, but it is so much more than that. Other people think of Cancun as just the area immediately surrounding the city of Cancun, or the hotel district which extends out on a narrow strip of land into the Caribbean. Still others think of Cancun as including the 40km portion of the coast of Mexico from the city of Cancun proper south to and including the small fishing village of Puerto Morelos. All of these descriptions would be correct, but each offers vacationers a distinctly different experience.



Perhaps the best known part of Cancun is the hotel district. It is situated on a narrow strip of land that extends from Cancun eastward out into the Caribbean for about 2-3 km before turning south southwest. From there it runs about 20 km reconnecting to the Mexican mainland at Punta Nizuc. Canals at both the northern and southern end of the hotel district make the hotel district technically an island, and allow a channel of ocean water 3-4km wide to separate the hotel district from the mainland. The hotel district is where you will find a staggering range of all-inclusive

resorts with price points ranging from budget friendly to ultra-luxury and everywhere in between. Properties located in the hotel district are more along the lines of high rise properties rather than the sprawling resorts situated further down the coast in the Riviera Maya region. They offer stunning views of the Caribbean and beautiful if small beaches. Their proximity to downtown Cancun means shopping and a wider range of nightlife are conveniently located. Vacationers who stay in the hotel district are more likely to venture beyond the confines of their resort. The recent attack in a popular nightclub aside, Cancun has for the most part managed to escape the violence that has impacted tourism on Mexico's west coast. Additionally most resorts in the Cancun Hotel District are protected by private and often extensive security teams.

Back on the mainland south of the city where beachfront property is more readily available, resorts are built as sprawling complexes reaching out more horizontally than vertically. All-inclusive resorts, mainly high end, dot the coastline south of the Cancun Hotel Zone for about 20km to and beyond the fishing village of Puerto Morales. These all-inclusive resorts offer a more laid back setting for your vacation where the property is the focus. Most seem to appear out of the marsh with occasionally unimproved roads and properties set out in the midst seemingly of nowhere. Yet the locations offer some of the most attractive beaches in the world.

While these properties are expansive, oceanfront and offer spectacular views quite different from the hotel district, they don't all have expansive beaches. Some have only a small strip of sand surrounded by rocky areas that are not amenable to sunbathing. Others have a wide and lengthy beach area that rank them amongst the best beaches in the world. Although Mexico does not technically allow topless sunbathing, some of the adult only properties from Puerto Morelos south to Riviera Maya tolerate it. If nudity makes



you feel uncomfortable, take care when working with your travel agent to ensure you don't book into a property where topless sunbathing is acceptable.

Regardless of where you stay, the area between Cancun and Riviera Maya offers unique day excursion opportunities. For those interested in the Mayan history of the region there are ruins and museums



aplenty. The best known Mayan ruins accessible from Cancun are located in Chichen Itza. A trip to those ruins means a long, hot day with 6-8 hours on the road depending on traffic and where in Cancun you are staying, but many find it well worthwhile. If the drive bothers you, try the ruins in Tulum. Though less extensive than Chichen Itza, that drive is only 1-2 hours each way. Other day excursions include the Xcarat water park. It includes tubing through underground rivers and caves, snorkeling in one of the world's largest natural saltwater

lagoons, a water park, and so much more. Another day excursion could take you to Xel-Ha which offers many of the same types of activities as Xcarat with the added attraction of ecological trails and gardens. And of course there is always the shopping and nightlife that downtown Cancun offers.

With its location on the Caribbean Sea, all of the properties in and around Cancun offer a wide range of water sports. Parasailing, wind surfing, jet ski tours, kayaking...whatever floats your boat (see what I did there??). Just about all of the resorts offer a concierge service that can help you sort through the wide range of activities and excursions available in and around Cancun and map out some great day trips. And if you get bored with Cancun you can always hop the ferry over to Cozumel for even more shopping or some of the best drift diving in the world.



Whether you are in the spring break crowd, are content to hang out at the all-inclusive pool bar, or you are the adventurous sports type eager to snorkel and dive your way through the Caribbean, Cancun offers something for you.