



# A slice of Caribbean paradise

It may conjure images of tequila or tacky resorts, but Mexico is perfect for both the beach bum or culture vulture writes Karen Creed

**M**ention Mexico and most will respond with Cancun. Like or loathe the idea of a booming holiday resort, this hotspot is Mexico's most important tourist destination. Cancun is 33 years old, and like many 30-somethings, she is absolutely hitting her prime. From a small barrier reef, this coastal destination on the eastern side of the country has quickly developed to become the holiday haven of the 21st century. While I might have missed Spring Break - when thousands of American college kids head to the Riviera Maya and merely do what Europeans do in Ibiza and Crete - it still felt like the height of party season when I set foot there in early July. My holiday was focused on the stunning Yucatan peninsula, with our first stop being - yes you guessed it - Cancun.

Cancun is overflowing with nightlife, with a strip of cocktail bars and rocking nightclubs. Before I dismissed it as another tacky resort, there were the extravagant five star hotels to consider, complete with white sandy beaches and the tropical blue sea with stunning yachts afloat. Cancun remains Mexico's calling card to the world, perfectly showcasing both the country's breathtaking natural beauty and the depth of its 1,000-year history. Almost three million people visit this enticing beach resort annually - most of them on their

first visit. If you are not a sun worshipper there is still plenty to do - like a jet-ski tour of the jungles or a visit to one of several Maya ruins, followed by an afternoon of shopping at the local mercados or designer stores. My first day started as any lazy holiday should - lounging around the pool, with the only decision-making involving what to order for lunch and what cocktail would follow. Most of Cancun's luxury hotels have pools so spectacular that you may find it tempting to remain poolside. But don't, as the nearby Caribbean sea offers refreshingly warm seawater that is a stark contrast to our numbing Atlantic.

Anyone planning to use a holiday in Mexico as a chance to detox, should postpone such a drastic plan. As a fish lover, I was converted to meat for the week, with the irresistible steak and beef burritos in Mexico's diamond star restaurants. This was

usually preceded by a good helping of tacos and guacamole, washed down with Margheritas or Coronas. Needless to say I adhered to Mexican culture with enthusiasm. Even a tourist feeling apprehensive about visiting foreign soil will feel completely at ease here as English is spoken and dollars are accepted.

I ran out of days before I ran out of things to do in Cancun. After living it up, I decided to venture away from the bustling resorts, intent on finding what else the Riviera Maya had to offer. In addition to attractions of its own, Cancun is a

convenient distance from the more traditional resorts of Isla Mujeres and the coastal zone now known as the Riviera Maya - extending down from Cancun, through Playa del Carmen, to the Maya ruins at Tulum, Cozumel, and Chichén Itzá. After a short tour of awe-inspiring Chichen Itza we continued onwards to the capital city of Yucatan. In recent years Merida (better known as the "white" city) has been in the midst of a cultural explosion. Its colonial history is distinctive with wide tree lined boulevards, flanked by authentic buildings with restaurants,

shops and bars. Merida is also a great base to explore the more untouched parts of the coast.

The nearby Flamingo Coast is as enticing as its name suggests - a beautiful unspoilt part of coastline running eastwards from the town of Progreso with miles of palm fringed white sand beaches. The charm of the region is felt most in the small villages and towns dotted along the coast. Inland you will see a string of shallow salt lakes with flocks of flamingos, which give the region its name. Accommodation and dining can be as authentic as you wish - with many of the haciendas having been restored into beautiful boutique hotels and restaurants. While this part of Mexico is opening up to the possibilities of sustainable tourism, it also offers a golden opportunity for investors. Flamingo Lakes ([www.therightmoveabroad.ie](http://www.therightmoveabroad.ie)) is one such opportunity - with five star homes to be

built on a private nature reserve complete with golf course, leisure facilities and their own exclusive beach club. Experts see Mexico as a top location for property purchase given its excellent value for money, a vibrant culture and infrastructure as solid as North America. From a holiday perspective Mexico also gets top marks. Just don't forget the mosquito repellent!

*For more information on holidays to Mexico contact your local travel agent*

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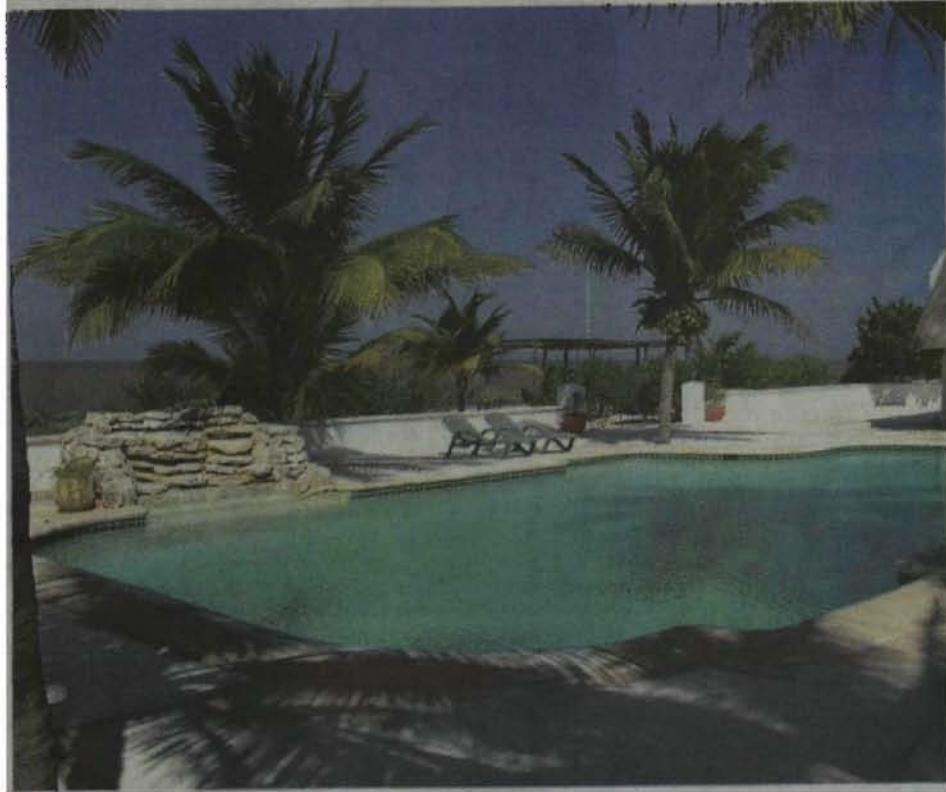
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