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# Cancun, Mexico

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## Overview

### Introduction

Cancun, Mexico, is wrapped in crystal clear water and brilliant sunshine, so it's no wonder its shoreline gets top billing. Government developers, looking for a way to eradicate the poverty of the region, created this comfortable resort area on the Mexican Caribbean from the sand up to take advantage of the gorgeous aquamarine water and tropical temperate climate. Cancun is the top resort area in Mexico.

Travelers who enjoy the feel of Old Mexico will never find Cancun to be as traditional, colorful or as spontaneous. With more than 32,000 hotel rooms, it's not necessarily the place for isolated sun worship, either. But those hankering for a no-hassle beach vacation can fly in and soak up the sun without speaking a word of Spanish (or exchanging U.S. dollars). And those interested in learning about the ancient Maya civilization can visit several exceptional archaeological sites on day trips.

Also within reach is the island of Cozumel, a haven for divers and snorkelers. And Playa del Carmen—once an oasis of rustic, laid-back charm—is one of the fastest-growing areas in the country, with a great variety of restaurants, bars, shops and entertainment. It is also the hub of a growing ecotourism movement. Isla Mujeres, the closest island to Cancun, is still famous for snorkeling and hasn't lost its friendly fishing-village allure. For a small-town experience on the mainland, Puerto Morelos, once just home to local fishermen, is just 20 minutes south of Cancun.



### Highlights

**Sights**—The palatial hotels that line Boulevard Kukulcan; the Mexican goods in Market 28 in downtown Cancun; a day trip to see Mayan ruins at Chichen Itza, Coba or Tulum; watching the sunset from the lagoon by La Isla Shopping Village.

**Memorable Meals**—Mexican and Yucatecan specialties at La Habichuela; cheap eats at Surfin Burrito; Caribbean lobster under the stars at Captain's Cove; anything on the menu at La Destileria.

**Late Night**—Taking in the latest dance tunes and people-watching at Mandala; a party cruise; dancing and watching the lively shows and celebrity impersonators at Coco Bongo.

**Walks**—Strolling along the beach; window-shopping in La Isla mall; exploring Parque de las Palapas or getting some exercise at the Malecon Tajamar (boardwalk) in downtown Cancun.

**Especially for Kids**—Dolphins at Dolphinaris in Wet 'n Wild; the marine life at the Interactive Aquarium; hanging out with live crocodiles at Croco Cun; taking the Jolly Roger pirate cruise.

### Geography

There are actually two Cancuns: the Zona Hotelera (Hotel Zone) on the island and "Ciudad" Cancun (better known simply as "downtown"), a district on the mainland that is more of a residential and business enclave. You can get from one to the other via a short bus or taxi ride.

The island, which is where most visitors spend their time, is 14 mi/22 km long, less than 0.5 mi/1 km wide and shaped rather like the number seven. It is connected to the mainland by bridges at each end, which were built after a landfill linked the island to the peninsula. It has calm, shallow waters off its northern side, wilder Caribbean seas to the east, and the vast, brackish Nichupte Lagoon between the island and the mainland.

There are no street addresses on Cancun island because there's really only one road—Boulevard Kukulcan. Places on the island are

located by their distance (in kilometers) from the northern end of the boulevard, which begins at the edge of downtown Cancun. Markers indicate every kilometer along the side of the road.

The bridge that connects the northern tip of the island to the mainland is just past the Kilometer 4 marker; the southern bridge to the mainland is at Kilometer 25. Thus, a hotel whose address is "Km. 12" is about 7.5 mi/12 km from the north end of Boulevard Kukulcan. Downtown Cancun, on the other hand, does indeed have streets with names and regular-sized city blocks.

## History

The low-slung jungles of the Yucatan Peninsula were first settled more than 2,000 years ago by the Maya. Their advanced civilization and elaborate temples continue to fascinate archaeologists and casual visitors alike. By the time Hernan Cortes began the Spanish conquest of Mexico in 1519, the Mayan culture was already in decline, but the conquistadores accelerated that decline with deadly European diseases and weaponry. Eventually, the northern part of the Yucatan was settled by landowners of Spanish descent who used the Maya as workers.

Despite its scattered agricultural holdings, the area was largely ignored by the rest of Mexico, both during the colonial period and after independence. That was mostly because the region was very isolated, and so forbidding that during the dictatorship of Gen. Santa Ana, prisoners were sent to the Yucatan as the ultimate punishment. For centuries, the only practical way to get there was by sea: The first rail line wasn't built until 1949, and the first airline, which was inaugurated with flights to Mexico City, started in the 1950s.

When the Mexican government began scouting sites for a tourist resort in the 1960s, the idea of Cancun was born. After a few years of furious building, the idea became a city. The first two resorts opened for business in 1974, and the surrounding region was designated as the state of Quintana Roo at about the same time. In the decades since, Cancun has grown more and more popular and has stimulated a booming tourism business along the Yucatan coast.

The island of Cancun now has no land left for building, but new developments with hotels and golf courses have been built on the coastal area south of Cancun, the Riviera Maya.

## Potpourri

If you want to see the first light of day strike Mexican soil, spend the night at Isla Mujeres, to the north of Cancun. It's the easternmost point of Mexico, and Punta Sur is the easternmost point of Isla Mujeres.

Before it became a resort, the area where Cancun now sits was inhabited by a dozen Maya fishing families.

The City nightclub with its spectacular shows is the largest in Mexico, hosting 5,000 partygoers at a time.

There's a gravestone for the pirate Fermin Mundaca in the small cemetery on Isla Mujeres. Mundaca designed it himself. However, he died in Merida and is buried there instead.

The Yucatan Peninsula is covered in thousands of cenotes, natural freshwater sinkholes. The Maya considered them sacred portals to the underworld. A cenote is the perfect place to cool off on a sweltering day.

## See & Do

### Sightseeing

The sights most Cancun visitors want to see are the beach and the ocean. That's probably a good thing, because there aren't many other attractions—no true casinos, few historic sites, few public parks or gardens, and no historic neighborhoods.

The hotels themselves are attractions. We recommend stopping at some of the more outlandish ones along the Zona Hotelera to have a margarita and marvel at the architecture—you'll find variations on Miami Beach and Las Vegas, along with Mexican themes. The buildings are a dizzying melange of styles, from block-long pink palaces with towers and cupolas to sleek, mirrored pyramids with huge, tree-filled atriums. Keep in mind, however, that many of them are all-inclusive and do not allow access to nonguests.

There are a few escapes from the resorts, however. Ruinas del Rey provides a decent, if brief, introduction to the ancient world of the Mayan civilization, especially if you can't make it to one of the bigger archaeological sites. Most hotel travel desks sell lagoon tours or something

billed as a "jungle tour" that's actually a boat ride through the lagoon with a stop for snorkeling at a coral reef.

For anyone interested in Mayan history and culture, a visit to one or more of their ruined cities is essential. Tulum, on the coast south of Cancun, is the closest, but tends to fill up with motor coach parties. Chichen Itza—voted one of the New Seven Wonders of the World—is the most famous and a UNESCO World Heritage site. Coba, the least developed of the three, is in a vast, shady jungle, making it ideal for an afternoon visit. Local tour operators offer convenient packages, or you can hire a car and organize your own visit.

## Historic Sites

### Cancun Center

More than a building, this 153,000-sq-ft/14,215-sq-m convention and exhibition center, one of the top five in the country, is a landmark. The surrounding area is a hub for activities that range from shopping and eating to disco dancing—think of it as the Times Square of Cancun. It is located at the point where the main thoroughfare, Boulevard Kukulcan, turns south.

Blvd. Kukulcan Km. 9  
Cancun, Quintana Roo, Mexico

**Phone:** 998-881-0400. Toll-free 866-891-7773

<https://cancunicc.com>

### Parque de las Palapas

Located in downtown Cancun one block off Tulum Avenue, Parque de las Palapas is the place to hang with the locals, known as *Cancunenses*. Visit on a Friday, Saturday or Sunday evening and try authentic Mexican street food, catch a free show on the main stage, browse the wooden carts that sell Mexican clothing and handicrafts, or just relax and watch how locals spend time with their families. Various activities are available for small children.

10 Margaritas, Supermanzana 22  
Cancun, Quintana Roo, Mexico

### Ruinas del Rey

This is the most extensive of the few ancient Mayan ruins on the island but is small compared to Tulum or Coba. The most remarkable thing about the ruins may be their setting—hidden in the midst of a modern resort area, though they are well marked by directional signs. The ruins include 47 structures, not all of them uncovered. There's a small ceremonial center and temple platforms dating from AD 1250, which are thought to have been important when the city was a port. It's also a great spot to watch and photograph large iguanas, which lounge in the sun on and around the ruins. Mosquito repellent is recommended during the rainy season in summer.

The ruins are open daily 8 am-5 pm. Admission is US\$4.

Blvd. Kukulcan Km. 20  
Cancun, Quintana Roo, Mexico

<http://www.visitmexico.com/en/el-rey-archaeological-site-in-cancun>

## Museums

### Cancun Maya Museum

This museum is the largest structure built by the National Institute of Anthropology and History since the Templo Mayor Museum opened in 1987 in Mexico City. Designed to promote the region's Mayan culture and roots, the modern structure took six years to build and features 350 artifacts and relics, including an exhibit of 14,000-year-old skeletal remains discovered in Tulum's underwater caves. The exhibit halls focus on the Mayan people, architecture, art and artifacts, including tools and fragmented sculptures. The San Miguelito archaeological site next to the museum recently opened to the public as well. The location was inhabited more than 800 years ago until the arrival of the Spanish conquistadores in the 16th century.

Blvd. Kukulcan Km. 16, Zona Hotelaria  
Cancun, Quintana Roo, Mexico

<http://inah.gob.mx/red-de-museos/313-museo-maya-de-cancun>

Tuesday-Sunday 9 am-5:30 pm. San Miguelito closes at 4:30 pm. US\$5 adults.

### Cancun Underwater Museum Visitors Center

One of Cancun's most popular underwater attractions now offers a topside view as an alternative for sea-wary visitors who want to view art without getting wet. The visitors center showcases replicas of the Cancun Underwater Museum's most popular underwater sculptures. The visitors center features a step-by-step process of how and why one ecosculptor created his art.

Kukulcan Plaza  
Cancun, Quintana Roo, Mexico

**Phone:** 998-206-0182

<http://musamexico.org>

## Neighborhoods & Districts

### Ciudad Cancun

This area on the mainland (known more commonly as downtown Cancun) was built to house the workers who were constructing the resort areas of Cancun in the late 1960s and early '70s. As a result, it has a more typical Mexican flavor than the island and has become a popular place to visit, especially for visitors who need a break from the hotel-and-beach scene. The city consists of *supermanzanas* (SM), or "super blocks," in which short streets run off main avenues named after archaeological zones. In the center of each super block is a small park. Avenida Tulum, the commercial heart of downtown Cancun, is undergoing an extensive facelift, but it still has some local shops, stores, banks, cafes and restaurants. The street is also home to some moderately priced hotels that appeal to budget-minded vacationers and those searching for less-touristy places.

### Malecon Tajamar

This boardwalk in downtown Cancun overlooks Nichupte Lagoon. The entrance is on Bonampak Avenue, directly across the street from Malecon Americas shopping mall. Visitors enjoy walking, jogging, rollerblading, flying kites or just relaxing and taking in the views of the lagoon. There are no services whatsoever, so it's important to take water and anything else you might need.

Bonampak Avenue  
Cancun, Quintana Roo, Mexico

## Amusement Parks

### Wet'n Wild

This multimillion-dollar water park is owned by Palace Resorts and is the only one in Cancun. Activities include wave pools, lazy river rides and bumper boats. A highlight is Dolphinaris, where you can swim and play with dolphins (<http://www.dolphinaris.com.mx>). The park is extremely popular with adolescents, honeymooners and families with children.

Daily 10 am-5:30 pm. US\$49 adults.

Bld. Kukulcan Km. 25 (at the southern tip of Cancun Island)  
Cancun, Quintana Roo, Mexico

**Phone:** 998-881-3030. Toll-free 800-365-7446

<http://www.wetnwildcancun.com>

### Xcaret

Xcaret can be described as a cultural ecopark that showcases Mexican and Mayan culture, food and natural treasures. Visit the aquarium or the butterfly pavilion, swim the underground river or take in a cultural show.

Guests may purchase tours for all of the Xcaret parks (Xplor, Xel-Ha, Xenotes, Xenses and Xoximilco) that include round-trip transportation. Admission starts at about US\$100.

Juarez Federal Highway, Km. 282  
Cancun, Quintana Roo, Mexico

**Phone:** 883-3143

<http://en.xcaretexperiencias.com>

## Zoos & Wildlife

### Croco Cun

At this crocodile and reptile zoo south of Cancun, near Puerto Morelos, you can see more than 300 crocodiles and learn about the toothy critters' lifestyle and evolution. Try walking through a compound full of live crocodiles. You will also see many other animals native to the Yucatan, including monkeys, snakes and deer, and you can feed the animals. Buses and minivans are available in Cancun and Playa del Carmen to take visitors to the zoo.

Daily 9 am-5 pm. US\$30 adults.

Carretera Cancun-Tulum, Km. 31  
Cancun, Quintana Roo, Mexico

**Phone:** 998-850-3719

<http://www.crococunzoo.com>

### Interactive Aquarium

A family entertainment venue where you can watch sharks and other local marine life in glass-enclosed aquariums. Tour guides identify the various fish that feed around the nearby coral reefs. You pay extra (and dearly) to swim and play briefly with dolphins.

Daily 9 am-8 pm. Entrance fee US\$14. Dolphin experiences (there are several options) US\$89-\$170. Free admission when booking a dolphin program.

Blvd. Kukulcan Km. 125, Hotel Zone (La  
Isla Shopping Village)  
Cancun, Quintana Roo, Mexico

**Phone:** 998-206-3311

<http://www.aquariumcancun.com.mx>

## Other Options

### Xoximilco

This is a colorful boat tour that highlights the best of Mexican culture, music and food. This lively fiesta is modeled after a similar attraction in Mexico City.

Admission starts at about US\$100. .

Cancun, Quintana Roo, Mexico

**Phone:** 883-3143

<http://en.xcaretexperiencias.com>

## Recreation

Outdoor fun in Cancun is all about enjoying the warm, clear Caribbean Sea. Nearly every kind of watersport is available, from windsurfing and sailing to fishing and scuba diving. The easiest way to rent gear or find an operator is through your hotel—many of the larger properties have a watersports crew and tour office available on-site.

First-class golf courses, health clubs and tennis courts are also available for anyone who tires of the ocean, although most hotel tennis courts are available only to guests.

## Beaches

The Caribbean side of the Zona Hotelera is justly famous for gorgeous white-sand beaches, but these aren't necessarily the best places to swim—the surf can pound mercilessly, and the undertow can be treacherous. Swim only where you see the water-safety pennant system: A white flag means the swimming is excellent, green signifies good or normal conditions, yellow means you should use caution, and black or red means conditions are unsafe. If you don't know what the water conditions are, don't swim. The safest place for swimming is along the northern shore of the island, facing Bahia de Mujeres.

All beaches in Mexico belong to the government and are therefore public. Once you are on the beach, you can walk in either direction for as long as you want. Legally, you can use the beach in front of any of the resort hotels and no one can ask you to leave. However, you are not entitled to use any of the facilities provided by the hotel. Several of Cancun's beaches, including those at Playa Tortugas and Playa Delfines, have services that are available to everyone.

### Playa Delfines

Facing the Caribbean and away from the hotel sprawl of the island, this beach is one of the largest and widest in Cancun. It's named for the wild dolphins that you can see swimming there in the early morning. Be careful of wading out too far from shore—the waves and undertow can be strong. On the other hand, it's good for body surfing and boogie boarding. A large, colorful CANCUN sign with the purpose of being a backdrop for photographs is located at Playa Delfines. Across the boulevard from Playa Delfines is the archaeological site Ruinas del Rey.

Blvd. Kukulcan Km. 18  
Cancun, Quintana Roo, Mexico

### Playa Tortugas

This beach, located along the northern end of the island, has restrooms, changing areas, a market and restaurants, plus huts where you can rent snorkeling equipment, boogie boards and other watersports gear. Vendors walk the beach selling local snacks.

Blvd. Kukulcan Km. 7  
Cancun, Quintana Roo, Mexico

## Boating & Sailing

You can rent all sorts of watercraft—Hobie Cats, WaveRunners and Sunfish, for instance—to play in the sea. Boogie boarding is especially popular, and equipment can be rented from seaside vendors at most beaches. Expect to pay about US\$60 for a board (add US\$60 or so for lessons). The calm waters of Nichupte Lagoon make it a popular spot to water ski. And you can get a bird's-eye view of the Hotel Zone while parasailing behind a boat.

Many of the major hotels have their own watersports rental facilities. Several independent marinas also specialize in rentals and deep-sea fishing charters.

### Aquatours Marina

This is one of the largest marinas in Cancun. You can tour through mangroves, snorkel in crystalline waters or sign up for a lobster dinner cruise. Catamaran excursions to Isla Mujeres also leave from this pier.

Boat tours from US\$65 adults.

Blvd. Kukulcan Km. 6.5  
Cancun, Quintana Roo, Mexico

**Phone:** 998-193-3360. Toll-free 866-393-5158

<http://www.aquatours.travel>

## Aquaworld

This is a one-stop shop for more than two dozen water-related activities. You can swim with whale sharks or see Cancun from the air in a Sky Rider, which is similar to parasailing (not advised for the weak or inebriated). The Sub Sea Explorer allows you to glimpse aquatic life through the windows of a submarinelike craft; the trips also include an hour of snorkeling time, if you want to get wet. Other activities include WaveRunner "jungle" tours (which really have nothing to do with the jungle) and waterskiing.

Daily 7 am-8 pm. Prices start at US\$44.

Blvd. Kukulcan Km. 15.2  
Cancun, Quintana Roo, Mexico

**Phone:** 848-8327. Toll-free 866-210-1236

<http://www.aquaworld.com.mx>

## Golf

There are plenty of courses to keep golfers occupied in Cancun. Official golf information is available from the Cancun Golf Association at <http://www.cancungolf.org>.

### Cancun Golf Club at Pok-Ta-Pok

This 18-hole course, designed by Robert Trent Jones Jr., is the oldest on the island. The holes are tucked alongside the sea, which makes for some nice scenery.

Blvd. Kukulcan Km. 7.5, Zona Hotelera  
Cancun, Quintana Roo, Mexico

**Phone:** 998-883-1230

<http://www.cancungolfclub.com>

### El Camaleon Golf Course Mayakoba

This 21,000-ft/6,400-m course was designed by Greg Norman (his first design in Mexico). The Camaleon hosts the Classic Mayakoba PGA tournament each February. There is a driving range and putting green, plus well-stocked pro shop and steak house overlooking the 18th hole.

Highway 307, Km. 297  
Cancun, Quintana Roo, Mexico

**Phone:** 998-206-4653

<http://mayakobagolf.com>

### Iberostar Cancun Beach & Golf Resort

The 18-hole course seems to have water everywhere, from lagoons to the ocean. Ancient spirits may also influence your tee shot: The 16th hole runs alongside the Ruinas del Rey archaeological park.

Blvd. Kukulcan Km. 17  
Cancun, Quintana Roo, Mexico

**Phone:** 998-881-8000

<http://www.iberostar.com/en/hotels/cancun/iberostar-cancun/eat-relax-enjoy>

### Moon Palace Spa & Golf Club

The only Jack Nicklaus Signature course in Cancun has three separate courses totaling 27 holes. The layout has lush vegetation, water features and sand traps. There is also an on-site day spa.

Highway 307, Km. 340 (at the Moon Palace hotel)  
Cancun, Quintana Roo, Mexico

**Phone:** 881-6089 or 881-6090

<http://www.palaceresorts.com>



## Playa Mujeres

Crowning the Playa Mujeres development in northern Cancun, this is an 18-hole, par-72 course designed by Greg Norman. It winds through tropical mangroves and has frequent beachfront views.

Bonampak Avenue Punta Sam  
Cancun, Quintana Roo, Mexico

**Phone:** 998-800-3892 ext. 109

<http://www.playamujeresgolf.com.mx>

## Scuba & Snorkeling

Almost all of Cancun's resorts rent snorkeling masks and fins, and they are complimentary for guests of the all-inclusive hotels. Although the underwater scenery isn't as stunning as that around Cozumel, you'll be surprised by the clarity of the water and the quantity of sea creatures.

Snorkelers may want to join an excursion to one of the reefs off the north shore of the island. A popular dive site is the Manchones Reef, which is about 5 mi/8 km northeast of the island—close to Isla Mujeres. Divers and snorkelers also may want to explore the starting point of the Palancar Barrier Reef at Punta Nizuc, near the southern end of the Cancun Zona Hotelera.

You can try snuba—diving attached to a 20-ft-/6-m-long air hose that gives you more flexibility than snorkeling but doesn't require certification—at Xcaret. The cost is about US\$54.

## Scuba Cancun

Offers both snorkeling and dive trips around Cancun, to Cozumel or in the caverns along the Riviera Maya.

Blvd. Kukulcan Km. 5.2 (at the Scuba  
Cancun Marina)  
Cancun, Quintana Roo, Mexico

**Phone:** 998-849-7508

<http://www.scubacancun.com.mx>

## Underwater Sculpture Museum

Located off the west coast of Isla Mujeres, this 4,500-sq-ft/418-sq-m snorkeling site ranges from about 10 ft/3 m to 20 ft/6 m deep and was created to draw visitors away from the fragile coral reefs. Artists created 500 underwater sculptures of local people and domestic scenes, such as a man watching TV, to a full-size VW Beetle that was specially designed for lobsters to make their homes inside, each statue is made from special materials to encourage coral growth. It is being built up over time and will eventually be one of the world's largest underwater sculpture gardens.

Visits to the site are offered by local tour operators starting at US\$29. .

Cancun, Quintana Roo, Mexico

**Phone:** 848-8312

<http://musamexico.org>



## Spas and Health Clubs

Cancun's spas, almost all of which are located within four- or five-star hotels, are some of the most sophisticated in the country. Besides yoga, Pilates, exercise rooms and pools, many adhere to the ancient healing practices of the Yucatan Maya, who incorporated regional plants, flowers, fruits and herbal lore into massages and body treatments. Others use sleep therapy, aromatherapy, hot stones, coffee and chocolate to detoxify and rejuvenate. Many hotels along the Zona Hotelera offer these soothing remedies in one form or another. Always confirm rates ahead of time, as there may be additional amenities used in your treatment that cost more than the base price of the therapy.

### Gem Spa

Located in the Fiesta Americana Grand Coral Beach, the Gem Spa's signature treatments use precious and semiprecious stones such as diamonds, amber, amethyst and jade in the first gem-inspired spa in Latin America. First off is a 10-step hydrotherapy ritual employing hot, cold, icy cold and steam rooms with herbs for relaxation and detoxification. This is followed by the gem massages going back to traditional elements of Russian, South Pacific, Asian and Maya massages. Rich woods, Italian mosaics and sand-colored marble floors are integrated into the sensuous two-story design.

Blvd. Kukulcan Km. 95  
Cancun, Quintana Roo, Mexico  
**Phone:** 998-881-3200  
<http://www.coralbeachcancunresort.com>

### LeBlanc Spa at Cancun

The spa at LeBlanc Spa Resort is a relaxing oasis that features hydrotherapy facilities, a beauty salon, and 19 treatment suites where expert spa technicians perform wraps, facials and massages. Guests are welcomed with a warm towel on the neck, aromatherapy and soothing music. Before and after your treatments, relax in the tranquil lounge area. Try the four-hand Kukulcan Mayan Massage.

Blvd. Kukulcan Km. 10  
Cancun, Quintana Roo, Mexico  
**Phone:** 327-0654  
<http://www.leblancsparesort.com>

## Other Options

### Garrafon

Tours to Garrafon Park on Isla Mujeres leave from the Marina Aquatours dock in Cancun at 9:30 am and return at 5:30 pm.

US\$89 adults.

Blvd. Kukulcan, Km. 4  
Cancun, Quintana Roo, Mexico  
**Phone:** 193-3360. Toll-free 866-393-5158  
<http://www.garrafon.com>

### Jolly Roger Pirate Show

Jolly Roger is a lively three-and-a-half-hour cruise and show on a pirate ship. The show is for all ages and incorporates music, dance and games. The price of the tour includes dinner and all you can drink. Choices include lobster, steak, surf-and-turf, grilled fish, chicken cordon bleu, vegetarian ravioli, or lasagna.

US\$97 adults.

Blvd. Kukulcan Km. 4  
Cancun, Quintana Roo, Mexico  
**Phone:** 998-849-4247  
<http://pirateshowcancun.com>

## Nightlife

Cancun is famous for its nightlife, and several of the big resort hotels in the Zona Hotelera have clubs. Some also host Mexican fiesta nights that include dinner and a folkloric show. Many are within walking distance of each other on Boulevard Kukulcan near the Cancun Convention Center.

You also can take the fiesta to the water on one of Cancun's "party cruises."

Most bars stay open until at least 2 am, and clubs until at least 3 am. Many places keep going until dawn, especially when spring-break revelers are in town.

## Dance & Nightclubs

### Coco Bongo

This is the one must-do nightclub in town. A large central bar is ringed with stadium-style seating for nearly 1,000 guests. Live performances go on all night and range from celebrity impersonators to flying acrobats to performers bringing popular movie scenes to life. Continuous laser-light shows, streamers, and balloon and confetti drops make it feel like New Year's Eve all year long.

Daily 10:30 pm-4 am. Cover charge starts at US\$65 and includes open bar.

Boulevard Kukulcan Km. 9.5, Suite 30 (in Forum by the Sea mall)  
Cancun, Quintana Roo, Mexico  
**Phone:** 998-841-4636  
<http://www.cocobongo.com>

### Mandala

Mandala just may be Cancun's hottest nightclub. Located right between The City and Coco Bongo, Mandala is just the right size, not too big and not too small, and features beautiful Asian decor. The entire front of the club is open, so all 800 partygoers can see everything that's happening in the Party Center.

Nightly from 9:30 pm. US\$60 for open bar.

Blvd. Kukulcan Km. 9  
Cancun, Quintana Roo, Mexico  
**Phone:** 848-8380, ext. 11  
<http://mandalanightclub.com>

### Senor Frog's

With clubs at nearly every resort town in Mexico, Senor Frog's may not provide much of a "cultural" experience, but it packs in the crowds for the nonstop spring-break atmosphere every night of the year. A DJ, emcee and live band keep the revelers in a tizzy all night long with reggae and pop music, drinking contests and general silliness until 2 am.

Daily from noon. Most major credit cards.

Blvd. Kukulcan Km. 9  
Cancun, Quintana Roo, Mexico  
**Phone:** 998-883-3454  
<http://www.senorfrogs.com/cancun>

### The City

The biggest disco in Cancun (and all of Central America, for that matter), The City holds more than 5,000 club-hoppers and caters to all ages and musical tastes, with nine bars, pop-rock and tropical rhythms, and techno music late at night. The dance floor takes center stage, with an impressive light system and stadium seating all around. Occasional live bands play, too, as well as celebrity entertainers. On Tuesday night, the party moves to the beachfront, with open-air bars, cabana seating and wet-T-shirt contests. Hip-hop nights and acrobatics spice up the scene.

Open daily. Cover averages US\$45, which includes open-bar privileges. Most major credit cards.

Blvd. Kukulcan Km. 9.5  
Cancun, Quintana Roo, Mexico  
**Phone:** 848-8385, ext. 115  
<http://www.thecitycancun.com>

## Performing Arts

There's not much in the way of cultural events or performing arts in Cancun. Xcaret, an hour south of Cancun, hosts nightly Mexican-themed shows with elaborately costumed folkloric dancers, mariachis, horses and other trained animals.

The Cancun bull ring hosts occasional concerts, boxing matches and special events, though they are mostly targeted toward the local population rather than to tourists.

Most all-inclusive hotels offer nightly shows in their theaters for their guests only. Impromptu performances by street performers are held nightly near the Party Zone and in the area malls. Visitors can even be surprised (and delighted) to find local musicians, sometimes quite young, playing instruments and singing on the public buses in exchange for tips.

## Spectator Sports

Cancun is a place for visitors to play their own sports, particularly watersports, but there's not much in the way of watching other people play.

A soccer stadium and a baseball field are located outside of Cancun (on the mainland), but games are not promoted to the tourist population. Bullfights are held weekly in season, but beyond that, there aren't many other regularly scheduled games or competitions.

## Bullfights

### Plaza de Toros

Occasionally, matadors still do battle with bulls (and they usually win) at Plaza de Toros in downtown Cancun. Before the fight, folkloric dancers and horse riders present a Mexican fiesta spectacle. Remember that bullfights are graphic (six bulls are usually killed in each performance) and may not appeal to everyone. All seats are in the shade.

Avenida Bonampak at Calle Sayil  
Cancun, Quintana Roo, Mexico

## Shopping

Cancun's shops offer anything and everything made in Mexico. Shopping and browsing are popular pastimes in the Zona Hotelera, but don't expect many bargains. In fact, prices are higher there than in other parts of Mexico.

Most shops are concentrated in a series of air-conditioned malls in the Zona Hotelera on Boulevard Kukulcan between Km. 7 and Km. 15. These malls have everything from souvenir shops to internationally known boutiques—resort wear and handicrafts are among the best buys. Look for handwoven fabrics, blown glass and jewelry. Specialties of the Yucatan include hammocks, Panama hats and guayaberas (traditional tailored men's cotton shirts).

Well-known franchise restaurants and open-air bars make the malls popular destinations by day or night. Check with the information kiosk at malls for discount coupons and where the day's sales are taking place.

Vendors may not accept credit cards, but even if they do, you often get a better price with cash. Most stores take U.S. dollars as well as pesos—prices often are marked in both currencies or just U.S. dollars. However, you might get a better deal if you pay in pesos, since the exchange rate is generally below the official rate given at banks. Bargaining is expected in the open-air and flea markets.

**Shopping Hours:** Generally daily 9 am-9 pm. Most stores, especially malls, are open on Sunday.

## Department Stores

### Liverpool

Mexico City's popular department store has established a branch at the upscale La Isla mall. Goods are limited to duty-free, boutique-style jewelry, watches, perfumes, cosmetics and photographic and video equipment. There's a second, larger location at Plaza las Americas in downtown Cancun.

Daily 10 am-10 pm.

Blvd. Kukulcan Km. 12.5 (La Isla mall)  
Cancun, Quintana Roo, Mexico

**Phone:** 848-7880

<http://www.liverpool.com.mx>

## Markets

### Market 28

Also known as Mercado Viente-Ocho, this is one of the best options for food (try the seafood at El Cejas), Mexican crafts, clothes and souvenirs. This market is local in nature, and prices are good, provided you're prepared to bargain.

Daily 8 am-8 pm.

Ave. Xel-ha Supermanzana 28  
Cancun, Quintana Roo, Mexico

### Mercado Coral Negro

This open-air market has a wide selection of stalls selling mainly Mexican crafts, plus stalls offering hair braids, temporary tattoos and touristy T-shirts. Sellers are known to be assertive, so shoppers are encouraged to stay in groups and have a clear idea of what they are willing to pay for a certain item so they aren't cajoled into spending more than planned.

Daily 10 am-10 pm.

Blvd. Kukulcan Km. 9 (next to the Convention Center and across from Coco Bongo in the Zona Hotelera)  
Cancun, Quintana Roo, Mexico

## Shopping Areas

### Forum by the Sea

A fun place to go to people-watch or browse, this open-air seaside mall has several name-brand shops and restaurants, including the popular chains Chili's and Carlos'n Charlie's. Human statues and other attractions keep nonshoppers occupied, also.

Daily 10 am-midnight.

Blvd. Kukulcan Km. 9.5, Zona Hotelera  
Cancun, Quintana Roo, Mexico

**Phone:** 883-4425

<http://www.forumbythesea.com.mx>

### La Isla Shopping Village

The most stylish, largest and most spectacular mall in Cancun, this is a one-stop, fits-all dining, entertainment and shopping destination with a Caribbean theme. It is a sprawling outdoor complex next to the lagoon, making it visually appealing. An aquarium, a boat ride on a canal, sidewalk artists, and international jewelry and clothing outlets will keep you busy for the better part of a day.

Daily 10 am-midnight. Shops close at 10 or 11 pm.

Blvd. Kukulcan Km. 12.5  
Cancun, Quintana Roo, Mexico

**Phone:** 883-5025

<http://www.laislacancun.com.mx>

### Luxury Avenue

This stylish two-story mall offers duty-free high-end jewelry, gifts, fashions and accessories, plus a champagne bar. Top stores include UltraFemme, Ultrajewels, Cartier, Fendi, Louis Vuitton, Burberry and Mont Blanc.

Daily 10 am-9 pm.

Boulevard Kukulcan Km. 13  
Cancun, Quintana Roo, Mexico

**Phone:** 848-7320

<http://www.luxuryavenue.com>

### Malecon Americas

Malecon Americas makes up downtown Cancun's largest mall. Visitors will find many restaurants, both chain and independent; countless name-brand shops including Nike, Quicksilver, Guess and more; salons; department stores; jewelry shops; an enormous food court; a nightclub; and a movie theater. American movies are generally shown in English with subtitles unless they are geared toward young children, in which case they are dubbed over in Spanish. The mall is within walking distance of the entrance to the Zona Hotelera.

Tulum Ave. 260  
Cancun, Quintana Roo, Mexico

### Plaza Caracol

For visitors staying in the immediate area, this is a convenient spot to shop for souvenirs or grab a coffee at Starbucks. There are also a few upscale boutiques.

Daily 10 am-10 pm.

Blvd. Kukulcan Km. 8.5 (next to the Convention Center)  
Cancun, Quintana Roo, Mexico

**Phone:** 883-4760

<http://www.caracolplaza.com>

### Plaza Kukulcan

An enclosed mall with many fine shops, including Benetton, Mango, Kipling and Harley-Davidson, as well as a bank, and liquor and music stores. There's also a small food court, several restaurants including Ruth's Chris Steak House, and a luxury corridor lined with exclusive shops such as Fendi, Cartier and Swarovski.

Daily 10 am-10 pm.

Blvd. Kukulcan Km. 13  
Cancun, Quintana Roo, Mexico

**Phone:** 193-0161

<http://www.kukulcanplaza.mx>

### Specialty Stores

#### Envy

Hip clothes for twenty- and thirtysomethings with such brands as Versace, Wanama, Osira and Dolce & Gabbana. There are separate stores for men and women.

Daily 10 am-11 pm.

Blvd. Kukulcan Km. 12.5 (at the La Isla Shopping Village)  
Cancun, Quintana Roo, Mexico

#### Maraf

This store sells gold, silver and jewelry made with semiprecious stones. It will manufacture your own design, as well as repair and clean jewelry. Two additional locations.

Daily 10 am-10 pm.

Blvd. Kukulcan Km. 13 (in the Plaza Kukulcan mall)  
Cancun, Quintana Roo, Mexico

**Phone:** 883-0271

<http://www.maraf.com>

#### Plaza La Fiesta

Plaza La Fiesta sells virtually every Mexican souvenir under the sun, including pottery, jewelry, clothing, handicrafts, tequila, coffee, vanilla, T-shirts, magnets, leather goods and more. The 20,000-sq-ft/1,858-sq-m store is located across from the Cancun Convention Center. Prices are higher than you'll find in the markets, but the store is air-conditioned, and there's no haggling necessary. Prices are as marked. Other Plaza La Fiesta locations include La Isla, Plaza Kukulcan and Forum by the Sea.

Blvd. Kukulcan Km. 9  
Cancun, Quintana Roo, Mexico

#### UltraFemme

Excellent prices on a great selection of duty-free cosmetics and imported perfume.

Daily 10 am-10 pm.

Blvd. Kukulcan Km. 8.5 (in Plaza Caracol mall and La Isla Shopping Village)  
Cancun, Quintana Roo, Mexico

**Phone:** 883-1912

<http://www.ultrafemme.com>

#### Wayan Natural Wear

You won't find polyester or any other type of synthetic fabric at this shop: It specializes in clothing made from natural fibers from Indonesia. Mexican styles are also represented. Additional locations at Forum By the Sea, Plaza Kukulcan, Plaza Flamingo and Plaza Caracol shopping complexes.

Daily 9:30 am-5 pm.

Blvd. Kukulcan Km. 12.5 (at La Isla Shopping Village)  
Cancun, Quintana Roo, Mexico

**Phone:** 882-0789

<http://wayan.com.mx>

## Itinerary

### Day Trips

To **Chichen Itza**. This World Heritage site sits in the middle of the northern Yucatan Peninsula, southwest of Cancun. It contains a variety of buildings constructed between the fifth and 13th centuries. All were the product of the Maya, with some later structures by the invading Itzaes, a branch of the Maya living farther south. Intricate, graceful stone carvings are well-preserved, and some of the sculpture that is shaded from the sun still shows traces of color. The 79-ft-/24-m-tall, pyramid-shaped Temple of Kukulcan, or El Castillo (which visitors are no longer allowed to climb), dominates the site.

About 125 mi/200 km from Cancun, Chichen Itza is accessible by car, bus or air. Tours usually include transportation and a guide. If you want to avoid the crowds, plan to visit the ruins early in the morning before tour buses arrive or late in the afternoon after they leave. A more memorable visit coincides with the spring or autumn equinox, when the sun forms a light-filled figure of the ancient snake deity descending El Castillo. Daily 8 am-5 pm. Entrance fee US\$8 during the day, US\$15 at night. Tour guides are available for an additional cost.

To **Isla Mujeres**. This easygoing island is half the size of Cancun Island and has long been a haven for divers, anglers, escapists, adventurers—even pirates. Located 8 mi/13 km off the northeastern tip of Cancun, it can be reached by regular ferry service from Cancun for a day of snorkeling or for exploring by rented bicycle, golf cart or motor scooter. Numerous tour outfits in Cancun also offer their services. The beaches north of town are popular hangouts for swimmers and sunbathers. The island's only town is crammed with souvenir shops, but a few excellent folk-art boutiques sell high-quality pottery, wood carvings and weavings.

Garrafon Park at the southern tip of the island offers a variety of activities, including swimming with dolphins, manatees or sea lions, snorkeling, guided nature walks and ziplining. There is also a modern-sculpture garden, and the ruins of a small Mayan temple dedicated to the fertility goddess, Ixchel. Garrafon reef has been badly damaged by snorkelers, but it is now protected and efforts are being made to restore it.

To **Cozumel**. This popular resort island is less developed than Cancun and has even clearer water, since there is less wave action to stir up the sand in the shallows. Located about 40 mi/65 km south of Cancun, it is close to the second-longest barrier reef in the world, making it a paradise for divers and snorkelers. The calmer water on the west side is good for swimming, and the deserted beaches to the east have white sand but rougher surf—beautiful but not good for swimming. The island is also home to an ancient complex of postclassic temples dedicated to Ixchel, the goddess of fertility. The main plaza downtown is the social center of the island and is close to where cruise ships dock. Cozumel can be reached by plane from Cancun or by taking the ferry from Playa del Carmen.

To **Playa del Carmen**. The fastest-growing resort town in the whole state, Playa del Carmen is located about an hour south of Cancun, at the heart of the Riviera Maya. It is a funky town with expats from all over the world running businesses, and it's the mainland point of departure to Cozumel. Two of the most popular attractions in the Playa del Carmen area are Xcaret, a massive ecological theme park that features many of Mexico's natural and cultural attractions, and Xel-Ha, a privately owned aquatic ecopark.

To **Sian Ka'an Biosphere Reserve**. Located south of Tulum, Sian Ka'an is the largest protected area in Mexico—more than 1 million acres/40,500 hectares—and is a UNESCO World Heritage site. Its name means "the place where the sky is born." The site combines ecologically pristine reefs, wetlands, beaches and tropical forests, as well as archaeological sites going back 2,300 years. It is home to more than 350 species of birds and many other animals. On-site tours are offered by the Centro Ecologico Sian Ka'an's staff.

To **Tulum**. Tulum is about 80 mi/130 km south of Cancun on Highway 307. The area includes the rapidly growing city of Tulum as well as the ancient site of the Tulum Maya ruins. When the Spaniards first arrived from the sea they thought the ruins were the famous golden city of Eldorado, as the setting sun turned the buildings a golden color. Although small compared with the other major archaeological sites, Tulum is the only major Mayan city next to the sea, which adds significantly to the novelty value and touristic appeal.

However, Tulum's seaside setting is unforgettable. Swimming is permitted at the beach at the foot of the ruins. Buses from Cancun drop passengers off at the turnoff to the ruins, which lie less than 0.5 mi/1 km east of the highway.

To **Coba**. If you have time and feel adventurous, take the inland highway branching off Highway 307 near Tulum and head for this mysterious Mayan city, thought to have been the commercial hub of the Maya empire in the northern Yucatan. Mostly unexcavated and covered by jungle, the site is crisscrossed with limestone-paved roads built by the ancient Maya. It has some of the tallest pyramids and temples in the region, and many more structures are being uncovered. Dress for hiking and take water and insect repellent. Coba is much less crowded than Tulum. Bicycles are available for hire just inside the main gate and provide an excellent way of exploring the site. It is located about 105 mi/170 km southeast of Cancun.

To **Isla Contoy**. For bird-watchers or those interested in visiting an untouched island with nothing more than lizards, iguanas and seabirds

for company, tiny Contoy fits the bill. Tours depart from Punta Sam north of Cancun or the dock at Isla Mujeres for the one- to two-hour boat trip. Programmed excursions usually include snorkeling, a visit to the island's small museum and observation tower, and two walking trails. A maximum of 200 visitors a day are allowed on the island. Overnight stays in the national park are not permitted. Around 150 species of birds, 250 fish species, 100 different flora and three types of endangered sea turtles have been sighted there.

## Day By Day

We suggest a minimum of four nights in Cancun, even if all you plan to do is lie on the beach. (There's a lot of beach to lounge on—and it is irresistible.) Add one to two more days if you plan to visit other islands or ruins.

**Day 1**—Arrive and spend some time lying on the beach in front of your hotel. Later, go window-shopping at La Isla mall before having dinner at one of the restaurants there.

**Day 2**—Take a day trip to Isla Mujeres. Head out to the Forum by the Sea shopping mall at night for some grand people-watching and grab dinner at one of its restaurants.

**Day 3**—Scuba divers may want to head to Playa del Carmen to catch an early ferry to Cozumel, where the diving is spectacular. (Check with the Cozumel dive shops in advance to be sure they have a dive trip scheduled after your ferry arrives.) Nondivers can stay in Cancun to swim with dolphins, enjoy the beach or take a ride in the Sub Sea Explorer. At night, take in the scene at one of the dance clubs.

**Day 4**—If you've got a keen interest in ruins, sign up for an excursion, rent a car or take the bus to Tulum. Afterwards, if you're on your own, stop at Playa del Carmen to take in the funky Euro-Mexican ambience before heading back to Cancun. Freshen up and dine at one of the waterfront restaurants.

**Day 5**—Depart.

## Dining

### Dining Overview

As you might expect in a town full of upscale resorts, all kinds of international foods are available—haute cuisine as well as Chicago-style pizza and ribs. And wherever there are tourists, expect the usual U.S. franchises. Although dining is good in Cancun, it has become even better with the addition of several gourmet restaurants headed by celebrity chefs.

A late dinner is often the high point of the day (usually starting around 9-10 pm for locals, earlier for tourists). Be sure to taste some Yucatecan specialties such as *pollo pibil* or *cochinita pibil*—outstanding dishes of chicken or suckling pig in a rich achiote (annatto seed) sauce, wrapped in banana leaves and baked in a clay oven. Vegetarians will enjoy *papadzules*, tacos stuffed with boiled eggs and covered in pumpkin-seed mole. Fresh seafood, such as shrimp, fish and especially Caribbean lobster, is always an outstanding choice. Ceviche—fish marinated in lime juice—is a local specialty.

The southern half of the Hotel Zone has the greatest concentration of restaurants. Youth-oriented cafes and well-known chains are found in the many malls along Boulevard Kukulcan, especially at Forum by the Sea. Several restaurants have relocated or opened branches at or near the upscale La Isla Mall. Some hotels have exceptional specialty restaurants and often vie with other resorts to lure their guests away.

Those who want to dine "where the locals go" find many choices in downtown Cancun on the mainland, or on the beach under thatched *palapas*. This is where you'll often find the best dining deals.

It's best to make reservations at the pricier places Friday and Saturday nights during the high travel seasons, including Christmas week, Easter week and during July and August.

Expect to pay within these general guidelines, based on dinner for one, not including tax, tip or drinks: \$ = less than US\$20; \$\$ = US\$20-\$40; \$\$\$ = US\$41-\$65; \$\$\$\$ = more than US\$65.

## Security

## Etiquette



Since passage of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), Mexico has become an increasingly common destination for international business travelers. Nonetheless, the country's interesting and enjoyable traditions have not been diminished by the increased business traffic: The Mexican people and their way of life may well be the most memorable part of your visit.

**Appointments**—Having a local contact who can put you in touch with the right people is a big advantage. Set your appointments at least a couple of weeks in advance, if possible. Punctuality is expected, but not strictly adhered to, though as a visitor, you should be on time. For dinner parties and other somewhat social occasions, plan to show up about 30 minutes after the announced time.

**Personal Introductions**—Handshakes are the typical greeting between men. Maintain direct eye contact but not too intensely. When members of the opposite sex meet, the woman should extend her hand to initiate the greeting. Titles are important, and the title "Doctor" is used for those with doctoral degrees. Last names with the appropriate Spanish title are used. If your acquaintance has a professional title, you will learn it when introduced; if not, *senor* (male), *senora* (married female) and *senorita* (unmarried female) are appropriate. The title and the person's last name should be used until you are instructed otherwise.

Note that it is typical for Mexicans to have two surnames, one from their father and one from their mother. The father's surname will be given first during the introduction, and that's the name that is used to address or speak of the person. Thus, "Senor Mario Sanchez Benitez" would be addressed as "Senor Sanchez."

Mexicans warm quickly to friendships. Your acquaintances are as likely to hug on a second meeting as they are to shake your hand. This hug is called the *abrazo* and is common with both male and female acquaintances, although the hug may be accompanied by a kiss on the cheek between two women, or a man and a woman, and a pat on the back between two men.

**Negotiating**—Business in Mexico runs at a slower pace than elsewhere in North America and is open and relaxed. Typically, junior executives have very little authority, so endeavor to meet with people at as high a level as possible. Relationships are very important to the decision-making process, so spend time getting to know your associates and allowing them to get to know you. Mexicans typically dislike open disagreement, but they do like to negotiate.

**Business Entertaining**—Mexicans love to entertain and take pride in doing so. Typically, your host will pay, but you should offer to do so and, when refused, insist on paying "next time." Then, be sure to do so. If invited to an acquaintance's home, don't plan on discussing business: It's an opportunity to socialize.

**Body Language**—Conversations may take place at close quarters. Expect polite conversational touching. Refrain from placing your hands on your hips, as this can be perceived as an aggressive stance. Keeping your hands in your pockets is also bad form.

**Conversation**—Learn some Spanish phrases well—it will be appreciated. Be inquisitive about Mexican culture. Do not discuss travelers' health issues such as worries about drinking the water. Don't use the term "North American" to refer to someone from the U.S.: Mexicans consider themselves North Americans, as well. And don't initiate a conversation about the country's drug trade or drug-related violence; it's a touchy subject, and locals blame the U.S. for creating the demand that fuels the market. Better to talk about things that delight you about the country.

**Other Information**—You are not likely to encounter many women at the higher levels of Mexican business. However, women can and do conduct business in the country, though they may on occasion encounter some gender-based resistance.

**Dress**—Dress conservatively, particularly in business situations or if visiting a church.

## Personal Safety

**Crime**—particularly theft—does occasionally occur in Cancun, but some commonsense precautions should help keep you out of trouble. Be cautious where you walk at night, especially on the beach and downtown (on the mainland). Remember that inebriated tourists make inviting targets for thieves. Avoid leaving valuables unattended. This is especially true in regard to rental cars: Take anything of value with you when you leave the car or lock such items in the trunk. Keep your doors locked when parked.

Drugs have become more available in Cancun in recent years, but the penalty for possession remains severe and police do arrest tourists. Participation in any drug-related activity also potentially opens you up to the dangers of the local turf wars, which have been known to result in violence. Drug peddlers may target discos and markets.

Be cautious when swimming where there are warning flags indicating possible undertows or sharks. Although there have been rare shark attacks in Cancun, they happened because warning flags had been ignored.

Canada and the U.S. maintain consulates in Cancun with limited staff and hours. However, should you need assistance, the U.S. consulate is on the third floor of the La Europa building at Km. 13 of Boulevard Kukulcan, in the Zona Hotelera (phone 883-0272). Canada's consulate is located in the Centro Empresarial, Blvd. Kukulcan Km. 12 (phone 883-3360).

Always take someone with you when you withdraw money from an ATM. If you lose your way downtown, don't wander around—take a taxi to a familiar part of town (it will cost you all of US\$2.50 and keep you from ending up in a dangerous neighborhood). Avoid Avenida Lopez Portillo: It's dangerous and there's nothing for tourists there.

During spring break, fights between students and local residents can flare up. If this occurs, move away from the area of the fight as quickly as possible. Local police are never far away and are best equipped to handle the situation.

For the latest information, contact your country's travel-advisory agency.

## Health

Water served in restaurants at major hotels is purified (*agua purificada*). Otherwise, drink bottled water, which is widely available, or other prepackaged drinks.

Cancun has adequate hospitals, all of which have at least a few English-speaking doctors on staff. Good hotels also have English-speaking doctors on call at all times. To be safe, take along a sufficient supply of any medications you may need. If you get sick, medicines are available from several pharmacies in Cancun. Some painkillers, antibiotics, sleeping pills and other medicines that are considered controlled substances will require a prescription. In an emergency, go straight to the hospital.

Hospital Galenia is a modern hospital located on Avenida Tulum (phone 891-5200); Hospiten is also good and is on Avenida Bonampak (phone 881-3700); another good bet is Amerimed at Avenida Bonampak near Plaza Las Americas (phone 831-3400). All hospitals are in downtown Cancun.

For more information, contact your country's health-advisory agency.

## Disabled Advisory

Mexico is beginning to provide more facilities for visitors with physical limitations, but such facilities are not widespread. The airport and most international hotels, especially newer properties, have been designed to accommodate individuals with disabilities, but most restaurants, sidewalks and other attractions still present challenges. Cancun also has no buses with retractable stairs that allow access to wheelchairs. The good news is that Xcaret has special beach buggies for the wheelchair-bound.

## Facts

### Dos & Don'ts

Do feel free to bargain when it's appropriate. In fact, it's expected in most markets and street stalls (though never in Cancun's ritzy shopping malls and small boutiques). A good way to start is to offer half of what is asked, then work toward the middle. But don't bargain for something unless you really want it: It's considered rude not to buy once your price has been accepted.

Do be aware that high season begins around 15 December and continues through Easter. Cancun is very popular with Mexican vacationers during the Christmas and Easter holidays and in July and August during school vacations—reservations are suggested at least a few months in advance.

Do take time to explore the Riviera Maya south of Cancun as well as inland destinations; the Yucatan Peninsula is one of Mexico's most fascinating regions.

Don't buy souvenirs made from endangered species such as turtles, crocodiles, coral and jaguars.

Don't enter churches wearing shorts or other skimpy attire.

Don't cart away anything—not even a pebble—from archaeological sites. It's illegal to do so in Mexico.

## Geostats

**Passport/Visa Requirements:** All U.S. citizens must have a passport when traveling by air to or from Bermuda, Canada, the Caribbean, Central and South America, and Mexico. Citizens of Canada, Mexico and Bermuda also must have a passport or other designated secure document to enter the U.S.

Passports are required for land crossings at the Canadian and Mexican borders with the U.S. and for cruise passengers returning to the U.S. from Mexico, the Caribbean, Canada or Bermuda.

Canadian citizens need proof of citizenship—either a passport (recommended) or a certified copy of a birth certificate accompanied by photo ID. All visitors must fill out a tourist card. The Mexican government charges a tourism tax of US\$39 for all visitors except cruise-ship passengers and a departure tax of about US\$22, although both are usually included in airline-ticket prices. Reconfirm travel document requirements with your carrier before departure.

**Population:** 722,800.

**Languages:** Spanish, English.

**Predominant Religions:** Christian (Roman Catholic).

**Time Zone:** 5 hours behind Greenwich Mean Time (-5 GMT). Daylight Saving Time is observed from the first Sunday in April until the last Sunday in October.

**Voltage Requirements:** 110 volts.

**Telephone Codes:** 52, country code; 998, city code;

## Money

### Currency Exchange

It is quite possible to visit Cancun without using Mexican currency. U.S. dollars are accepted everywhere, and prices are often quoted in U.S. currency. If you obtain money from an ATM in Cancun, you will receive U.S. dollars or pesos according to your choice. However, bank fees have skyrocketed, and you will end up paying your hometown bank as well as a Mexican bank for the transaction.

If you plan to travel to other parts of the Yucatan, pesos may prove more useful (though U.S. dollars are widely accepted in Cozumel, Playa del Carmen and other resort areas). Always take small denominations of pesos to the more rural parts of the Yucatan, because it's often tricky to cash traveler's checks or large bills.

Be careful using ATMs: ATM customers are inviting targets for thieves, although muggings are infrequent in Cancun. Many hotels have ATMs in their lobbies and are a safe bet. If you need to change foreign currency or traveler's checks, the best exchange rates are found at banks in downtown Cancun; the worst rates are at the airport or at hotels.

Banks are generally open Monday-Friday 9 am-5 pm. Some are open on Saturday as well. Privately owned exchange booths or *casas de cambio* in downtown Cancun and at shopping centers in the Zona Hotelera offer slightly lower rates than banks. However, exchange booths are open longer hours and seldom have lines. Most will exchange both U.S. and Canadian dollars, as well as traveler's checks.

### Taxes

The government of Mexico charges a value-added sales tax (IVA) of 16% on virtually all transactions in the state of Quintana Roo. In most cases, it's included in the price quoted. In addition, hotels charge at least a 3% tax per room per night.

## Tipping

Plan to arrive in Cancun with 10-20 US\$1 bills for tipping. US\$2 per bag is sufficient for an airport porter or hotel bellhop. Taxi drivers don't expect a tip but appreciate one. In restaurants, 15% is the general rule. Note that large parties (typically groups of eight or more) almost always will be charged an additional percentage of the bill, usually between 6%-20%. In a resort, it is customary to leave a tip of US\$2-\$3 for housekeeping each night. Guests who tip waitstaff in resorts will always receive better service.

## Weather

Any time is great for a visit to Cancun. The summer months are more humid and warmer, with highs in the upper 80s F/20s C, but the sea breeze keeps you cool. It seldom rains in the winter. Hurricane season runs June-November, and that's when rain is most likely.

Cancun is especially popular in March and April as a spring-break destination for college students from the U.S. Mexican tourists flock to Cancun a week before and after Christmas, the week of Easter and in July and August. Make reservations early for those times.

## What to Wear

The dress code in Cancun might be described as elegantly casual. Beachwear is acceptable at the beach and pool but not elsewhere. It is best to cover up bare skin, or if wearing shorts and a T-shirt, use plenty of high-factor sunscreen.

Evening wear will depend on the venue and can vary from shorts or jeans and T-shirts to smart casual to elegant. Many of the all-inclusive resorts have one or two fine-dining restaurants with a dress code requiring closed-toe shoes, long pants and collared shirts for men.

## Communication

### Telephone

For both local and long-distance calls in and around Cancun, you are charged by the minute. Local calls cost a few cents, but long distance is usually expensive. Calls at hotels are the most convenient and therefore quite costly: Service charges are always high. (Hotels usually warn guests that international calls cost a lot.)

Least expensive are those made from public pay phones, which require a prepaid phone card—but they're becoming harder to find. You can buy phone cards at newsstands, malls and some shops for about US\$3.25 for 12 minutes or US\$5.50 for 20 minutes to call within Mexico. Within Mexico, dial 01, then the city code and then the number.

Long-distance calls to the U.S. or Canada are around US\$0.50 per minute. Beware of phones that allow you to charge calls to a major credit card: Rates are always exorbitant. To call the U.S., dial 001, then the area code and number.

Canadians can call home using the Canada Direct service, which will put them in contact with a Canadian telephone operator. The toll-free Canada Direct numbers for Mexico are 800-123-0200.

Although using a cell phone with a roaming agreement is the most convenient way to call, bear in mind that the charges are high. Most U.S.-based carriers have good coverage in the region. Visitors can buy SIM cards from local cell service provider Telcel if their cell is unlocked for about US\$15 and pre-purchase credits, as well, to make local calls and text.

### Internet Access

Internet cafes are available. You'll find them in some of the malls and throughout downtown Cancun. Sometimes there will be one or two within a block or two of a downtown hotel. Some of the four- and five-star all-inclusive hotels have free wireless internet access, and some charge extra. Many hotels have a small internet cafe off the lobby. Budget hotels tend to have internet access in the lobby. Prices for computer time vary, depending on the area. In the Zona Hotelera, prices range US\$2.50-\$5 for 15 minutes. In the downtown area, prices are US\$1.25-\$2 per hour.

Free Wi-Fi can be found at the airport, Starbucks, McDonald's, and in downtown Cancun at Malecon Americas. There are a few internet cafes located on Avenida Tulum between SM 4 and SM 9. Some malls offer free Wi-Fi, as well.

## Mail & Package Services

### Post Office

The main post office is in downtown Cancun. You may find it easier to mail letters and postcards from your hotel—there's a mailbox in the lobby of most hotels, and many hotel reception desks sell stamps. Monday-Friday 9 am-4 pm, Saturday 9 am-1 pm. Avenida Sunyaxchen (at Xel-Ha, downtown).Cancun, Quintana Roo, Mexico. <http://sepomex.gob.mx>.

## Newspapers & Magazines

*Cancun Tips*, a pocket-size guide published twice a year, is distributed free at the airport and in hotels and has been the best source for entertainment information in Cancun for many years. It is also available online. <http://www.cancuntips.com.mx>.

## Transportation

Most of Cancun is too spread out to be considered walkable, except for the cluster of hotels, restaurants and shopping malls around the Convention Center. Many visitors take the bus, which stops frequently along Boulevard Kukulcan and is a great bargain (US\$1 for each fare). Taxis also cruise the island's main road. They don't have meters, so visitors are advised to agree on a price before the ride starts. Cars are available for rent. Traffic is on the right side of the road.

Ferries make the short trip to Isla Mujeres several times a day. Intercity buses connect Cancun with other points on the Yucatan Peninsula, including all of the major Mayan sites. Cozumel can be reached by plane or by ferry from the town of Playa del Carmen, which is an hour's drive south of Cancun.

The road from Cancun to Tulum, Highway 307, is four lanes.

## Air

Major airlines serve Cancun International Airport (CUN), which is on the mainland, 10 mi/16 km southwest of the island. The airport has three terminals. Terminal 3 is considered to be the international terminal, but there are a few airlines that fly internationally that are based in Terminal 2, so it's important to confirm your terminal ahead of time. There is a free shuttle that runs between terminals 2 and 3 every 15-30 minutes. Basically all security regulations that apply in U.S. airports also apply in the Cancun airport (regarding liquids and so forth). It is important to remember that if you buy liquid duty-free items in the Cancun airport, you will be able to carry them on to your flight, but if you have a layover during which you will have to pass through customs in the U.S., you will have to put the items in your bags when you pick up and recheck them. Phone 886-0183. <http://www.cancun-airport.com>.

### Connecting Transportation

#### *Best way:*

If your hotel doesn't provide shuttle service, your best bet is a taxi. There are both individual taxis and shared taxis/shuttles (known as *colectivos*), which cost about US\$12 per person. If there's more than one person in your party, an individual taxi is almost as cheap as a *colectivo*—and it will certainly be faster and more comfortable.

Fares can vary greatly, depending on where you're going: The airport is about 9 mi/15 km from the closest hotels, and nearly 25 mi/40 km from those at the north end of the island. A taxi ride from the airport to the Zona Hotelera can be reserved online before arrival and costs roughly US\$40 one way, US\$70 round-trip for a standard taxi for up to three people. A limousine for one starts at US\$171 one way or US\$305 round-trip (<http://cancunlimo.net>).

Tickets, even for individual taxis, can also be purchased in advance from the ticket booth located between the customs exit and the main airport exit.

#### *Other options:*

Cancun Shuttle offers private shuttle service for individuals and groups. Rates from the airport to downtown or the Zona Hotelera start at US\$12 per person. Reservations can be made in advance (phone 848-0335 or toll-free 888-414-0017; <http://www.cancunshuttle.com>). A variety of other providers offer a similar service.

ADO buses run directly from the airport to the downtown bus terminal for about US\$4.50 per person. This is good if immediately connecting to a bus taking you farther down or up the coast. <http://ado.com.mx>.

Aside from taxis and hotel shuttles, the only other choice is a rental car. Major companies maintain offices at the airport. Car rental can usually be arranged in most hotels, and there are numerous rental offices on Boulevard Kukulcan and in Cancun City.

## Bus

### Downtown Cancun Bus Terminal

Scheduled bus service is both efficient and relatively inexpensive. For destinations along the coast to the south, such as Tulum, buses usually are much cheaper than organized tours, and they're only slightly less convenient. There is also service to inland cities such as Merida and Valladolid. Several companies offer service, and most are based in or near the bus terminal in downtown Cancun. Avenida Tulum at Avenida Uxmal, Cancun, Quintana Roo, Mexico. Phone 998-887-1149. <http://ado.com.mx>.

## Car

Renting a car in Cancun is easy, although it's not cheap. All would-be drivers are required to be at least 21 years of age (sometimes 25) and must present their local national driver's license and passport along with a major credit card with sufficient funds to cover the estimated cost of the rental in full.

A rental car is unnecessary in Cancun, although it is a convenient, if pricey, way to reach more distant attractions. You may be able to get a better deal by reserving a car in advance from your country of origin. Rates start at about US\$50 a day, depending on the model. Be sure to check the condition of the car before you take it, and make sure Mexican liability insurance (*seguros*) is included (comprehensive coverage, about US\$50 per day, should be seriously considered). If you have an accident without insurance, you must settle the claim there or go to jail until it is resolved. If your credit card covers collision and theft insurance, make sure that the coverage is valid in Mexico.

Driving on the island is easy because it has only one main avenue, and hotels generally offer free parking. On the other hand, on the mainland (in downtown Cancun), it can be confusing, and parking is scarce there. Speed limits are occasionally enforced outside of the cities, and speed bumps (*topes*) are used to slow traffic coming into populated areas. Driving is on the right. Note that gas stations don't accept credit cards or U.S. dollars. Also, an attendant pumps your gas for you, and you are expected to tip about 10 pesos.

You must use a hands-free device if you wish to use your cell phone when driving.

## Ferry

### Cancun-Isla Mujeres Ferry

These fast ferry boats are the most convenient way to get to Isla Mujeres. They operate daily from the Playa Tortuga dock along the Zona Hotelera. Ultramar boats depart Cancun every hour (except 3 pm) 9 am-5 pm. They return eight times a day 9:30 am-5:30 pm. Ultramar also sails to Garrafon Park in Isla Mujeres from the Playa Linda dock. The round-trip fare is about US\$15. Blvd. Kukulcan Km. 4 (across the way from the Cancun Convention Center, next to Teatro Cancun). Cancun, Quintana Roo, Mexico. Phone 998-881-5890.

<http://www.granpuerto.com.mx>.

### Puerto Juarez-Isla Mujeres Ferry

The Ultramar ferry leaves the modern Gran Puerto Cancun 365 days a year every half-hour 5 am-8:30 pm and at 9:30, 10:30 and 11:30 pm. The round-trip fare is about US\$15 adults. There is a parking garage available. The ride is about 20 minutes long. Phone 881-5890.

<http://www.granpuerto.com.mx>.

There are also smaller, slower ferries available from Puerto Juarez (Transportes Maritima Magana) and a car ferry available 5 mi/8 km north of Puerto Juarez at Punta Sam (Naviera Contoy Car Ferry). Avenue Jose Lopez Portillo SM. Cancun, Quintana Roo, Mexico.

## Public Transportation

### Buses

Buses are the only public transportation in Cancun. They run along Boulevard Kukulcan in the Zona Hotelera and stop at *paradas* (bus stops), which are marked. Buses also connect to the commercial area along Avenida Tulum in downtown Cancun. Bus stops are easy to find, and bus drivers are happy to advise you when your stop is approaching, if you're not sure where you are.

Buses marked R1 run in a circle from the Zona Hotelera to downtown Cancun via Avenida Tulum. Buses marked R2 and R15 are the ones to take for the Wal-Mart supermarket. For getting back and forth to downtown Cancun or for routes within the Zona Hotelera, any bus will do since the various routes don't affect things until they are deeper into the city.

Daily 6 am-midnight. Bus fare in the Zona Hotelera is US\$1, or 17 pesos, and in the downtown area, 10 pesos. Drivers prefer exact change but will make change from Mexican coins, Mexican bills or U.S. bills; they will not accept U.S. coins. Cancun, Quintana Roo, Mexico.



## Taxi

Though cheap when compared to taxis in many developed countries, the cost of cab rides has increased and can add up if you use them a lot. There are no meters, but prices are based loosely on distance. (From the Zona Hotelera to downtown costs roughly US\$10-\$19.) The minimum fare in the Zona Hotelera is US\$7.50. Always negotiate the fare before getting into the car. Most hotels post approximate taxi fares near their entrance—be sure to consult them before you start your haggling.

Some drivers speak some English, and fluent English-speaking drivers can be hired by the hour. Though it's convenient to take a cab right from the hotel door, you can save some money by catching a roving cab on the road outside the hotel. Minimum fares within the downtown area are about US\$2 (35 pesos).

## For More Information

### Tourist Offices

#### Cancun Convention and Visitors Bureau

Monday-Friday 9 am-5 pm. Blvd. Kukulcan Km. 9, Zona Hotelera.Cancun, Quintana Roo, Mexico. Phone 881-2745.  
<http://www.cancun.travel>.

#### Cancun Municipality Tourist Office

Monday-Friday 9 am-4 pm. Palacio Municipal, Avenida Tulum, Ciudad Cancun.Cancun, Quintana Roo, Mexico. Phone 887-3379.  
<http://cancun.gob.mx/visitantes/direccion-de-turismo-de-cancun>.

#### Quintana Roo Tourism Office

Monday-Friday 9 am-8 pm. Avenida Yaxchilan, S.M. 17.Cancun, Quintana Roo, Mexico. Phone 881-9000. <http://sedetur.qroo.gob.mx>.