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Cancun - The Caribbean Mexico Style

by Bob Rice

Browsing through the tour brochures it is very easy to gloss over Cancun as just another of the many Mexican destinations offered to us this winter. A visit to this resort area at the tip of the Yucatan Peninsula reveals a jewel for those seeking history, white sand beaches and an atmosphere geared strictly for the holidayers.

It may seem hard to believe but, a mere 20 years ago, Cancun didn't exist!

This is a paradise that was built strictly for tourist. Selected by a computer, carved out of dense jungle, dredged from mangrove swamps and reclaimed from the sea, Cancun was to be the future of tourism in Mexico.

Did it work? Most certainly. Even a direct hit by Hurricane Gilbert in 1988 couldn't destroy the dream.

The number of hotels along the beach strip is being added to on a controlled basis. The structures themselves are impressive. Don't look for boxy high-rises. Each property has its own unique identity. Furthermore, because the hotel area is actually because the hotel area is actually and island connected to the mainland by a small causeway, all hotels are on the waterfront, be it the Caribbean or the lagoon.

Cancun City itself is worth some of your time. Located near the tiny fishing



Photo by Bob Rice

that boasted a population of just under 600 back in the 1960's Cancun is now home to almost 300,000 people, every one of whom is connected to the tourism or hospitality industry.

Guillermo Martinez came to Cancun in 1874. At that time the government was installing the sewage, hydro and water facilities that would be the life-lines of the new resort area. His specialty was transportation and in the ensuing years he has seen his IMC company become the largest operator of ground transfers and sightseeing tours. If you

have visited Cancun on one of the packages offered by Canadian tour operators, it is most likely that you have travelled between the airport and your hotel on an IMC vehicle.

Martinez remembers a time when the broad, palm-lined Kukulcan Boulevard leading to the hotel area from downtown was just a bumpy road. He and his fellow tourism pioneers put up with hordes of mosquitoes and occasional alligator lounging in the parking lot as they built their paradise.

Today Cancun offers something for

almost everyone. Every type of water-sport is available. The beaches, particularly on the Caribbean side, are almost blinding in the sunlight.

If you fancy a game of golf you can try the Robert Trent Jones-designed 18-hole course with green fees in the range of \$10 US. I saw a lot of people walking about with tennis and squash racquets and most hotels are equipped with an exercise facility of one type or another.

The Mayan ruins of the Yucatan are a major tourist attraction and half-day tours to Tulum or full day excursions to the major find at Chichen Itza should be booked soon after your arrival.

There is plenty of shopping, either in the hotels or some of the malls around the city. Spend some time downtown sampling real tacos and other Mexican delights but keep in mind that everything closed down from one until five in the afternoon. As modern as Cancun may be, the traditional siesta still dictates the business hours.

At night you may want to visit one of the large discos or plan an evening with dinner and a show such as I did at El Jaguare, where the beef is sensational and Brazilian music and dancing is the highlight.

Cancun. Call it Mexico's premier tourist attraction.

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