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Sway to the romantic rhythm of Mexico in ench...

by Jennifer Chester

Sugar-soft sand, crystal clear waters, spicy cuisine, serious bargains, fabulous golf, archaeological treasures. Sound tempting? This just begins to describe your next vacation in Cancun and

Cozumel, two of Mexico's most beautiful resort areas.

Cancun is a modern vacation paradise nestled between the emerald lagoon and the Caribbean Sea. Though you may wish to spend your days lying in

the sand watching the waters change from pale aqua at dawn, to vivid turquoise, to rose-streaked lavender at sunset, there are a number of activities offered in Cancun.

Every watersport imaginable is available including kayaking, sailing, diving and deep-sea fishing. Divers and snorkelers can see submerged pirate ships and pink and black coral reefs teeming with jewel-toned tropical fish. For the golf enthusiast, the Pok-Ta-Pok golf course, designed by Robert Trent Jones, Jr., has a Mayan ruin located beside the 12th hole. For families, a visit to the Mexico Magico theme park provides a day of fun.

For the serious shopper, a number of modern air-conditioned malls such as Plaza Caracol, offer designer clothes and fragrances at bargain prices. Cancun City, connected to the resort area by bridge and easily accessed by taxi or bus, offers local handicrafts. Good buys might include woven baskets, papier mache skeletons used in Day of the Dead celebrations (on All Soul's Day), amates (colourful paintings on bark) carvings, silver jewelry, hand-made leather huarache shoes, and of course, Tequila and Kahlua.

You might wish to sample the local Yucatan cuisine including sopa de lima (lime soup) and poc chuc (a pork dish using soured



Let yourself be seduced by the azure sky and sparkling water, the machi bands, the spicy cuisine and the ancient Mayan ruins of Mexico.

oranges and onions) or try a variety of international dishes. In the evening, consider seeing the Ballet Folklorico, a presentation of regional song and dance, or visiting one of the various discos and bars.

There are a number of day trips easily made from Cancun. Just south of Cancun is the resort area of Playacar. Nearby Playa del Carmen offers a number of restaurants, bars and shops. You can visit the walled Mayan city of Tulum or the Sian Ka'an biosphere preserve where 320 species of birds and 69 varieties of reptiles and mammals live in virgin jungle, coral beaches, and mangrove swamps (accessed by walking trails). A two-hour drive through the jungle brings you to Chichen Itza, one of the world's best archaeological sites. There, the Mayan El Castillo pyramid looms over ancient ball courts, an observatory, and sacred temples. At the Caves of Balankanche, there are guided tours of the spectacular stalactite and stalagmite formations.

A favourite stop for cruise ships is the island of Cozumel. Excellent visibility and coral reefs make Cozumel's surrounding waters especially appealing, so scuba divers. At Chankanaab Lagoon you can wade into a world teeming with brightly coloured fish or cruise over reefs in a glass bottom boat. Cozumel offers excellent beaches, shopping, restaurants, and discos.

There are a number of day-trips from Cozumel. From May to September the Cozumel museum offers excursions to watch sea turtles lay their eggs on secluded beaches. The town of San Miguel is only 20 minutes away by taxi. There, you can visit the Malecon, a boulevard lined with restaurants, cafes and shops. For the adventurer, Mayan ruins like Uxmal are located in the lush jungle of the Yucatan interior. Naturalists lead expeditions into the rain forests near Palenque. The dense

foliage provides shelter for parrots, can, butterflies, monkeys, tapirs, jaguars. Merida, the "white city" seen as capital of the Yucatan, is a seven drive from the Caribbean coast.

Whether your interest be Mayan Mariachis, scuba-diving or shop islands of Cancun and Cozumel, something for you.

FAST FACTS

Getting there: There is both scheduled and non-stop charter service to Cancun from Toronto. Ask your travel agent.

Flying Time from Toronto: About 4 hours.

Entry requirements: Proof of Canadian citizenship (such as a valid passport, birth certificate) and photo identification are needed along with a Mexican tourist card. Ask your travel agent.

Language: Spanish.

Currency: New Mexican Pesos (US dollars recommended).

Climate: Sub-tropical.

Where to stay: Caribbean Village Cancun is an all-inclusive resort located in the heart of the resort area. This front resort offers all meals, complimentary bar, two tennis courts, pools, disco, activities for kids, snorkeling, windsurfing, and sailing offered at the water centre on Nichupte Lagoon. Air-conditioned hotel rooms are in a modern rise complex.

For those who long for a more relaxed pace, the Caribbean Village Playacar located 64 km south of Cancun. It offers meals, complimentary bar, use of club facilities including snorkeling and windsurfing, pools, aerobics, volleyball, bicycling, golf, 3 tennis courts, a disco and activities for kids. Low-rise villas house 8 air conditioned guestrooms with 2 queen satellite TV, full-bath and balcony or

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Located in Playacar, the hottest new resort area south of Cancun, sparkling new Caribbean Village is designed in an informal village set