

110°

EAST COUNTY LIVING

lifestyles & perspectives

JUNE/JULY 2019 · ISSUE 6

Selfcare &
Healthcare
Professionals

**A BODY
AFTER
BABY**

FREE SUBSCRIPTION



SPOTLIGHT ON
**artful
surgery**

THE ZIMMERMAN AGENCY

A MAGICAL MAYAN GETAWAY

BY TRICIA PIQUERO

MAHEKAL
BEACH
RESORT

I HAVE VISITED THE MAYAN RIVIERA in Mexico on several memorable occasions. The region has become one of my favorite destinations with an endless amount of exploring I have yet to do. Last month, I spent several days in a piece of Mayan paradise called Mahekal Beach Resort. “Mahekal” is the Mayan word for “magical,” which was an apt term for the enchanted qualities of that place.

I arrived on a sunny Spring afternoon. Temperatures were in the low 80s. The scenery and weather provided a perfect transition from my Northern California home to my new Mexican oasis. Mahekal is located in between the dense Riviera Maya jungle and the growing area of Playa del Carmen, which is on the Yucatan Peninsula, an hour’s drive or less from the Cancun Airport.





My days at the resort strengthened my first impression of entering a tropical native paradise. The architecture, furnishings, and decorations reinforce the sense of being in a native village with all the modern-day comforts and amenities. The landscape of the resort is covered with a multitude of different natural plants and trees. Lovely pathways wind through manicured lawns and among a rich variety of native plant species.

The feeling of being in a native village is especially reinforced by the fact that all the buildings including the four restaurants, the lobby, and the rooms are constructed with natural wood beams and palapa style dramatic vaulted thatch roofs, which is an architectural feature common in the West Mexican region. The colorful and detailed Mayan décor compliments the open air bungalow style buildings and tropical jungle landscape.

Each guest room is an individual palapa unit with its own high-peaked thatched roof. Some of the bungalow-style residences are two-story, with upper and lower rooms. Each unit has a little porch with a sitting area, table, chairs, and a hammock. The theme is native/bohemian but the accommodations are modern with a comfortable king-size bed, a spacious fully equipped bathroom, and subdued lighting. The floors are hand-painted cement, beautiful to the eyes and cool to the feet on a hot day. Colorful pillows, Missoniesque fabrics, and other elements in the room provided bright and authentic corroboration to the sense of being in a traditional yet luxurious environment. The architecture had an outdoor quality, even when inside. Complimentary broadband is available so I could use my phone and my Ipad, but a television was deliberately omitted.

The Mahekal Resort provides a serene relaxed atmosphere — offering guests a quiet “unplugged” retreat from their normal busy, demanding lives. When I arrived, Rosa — an enthusiastic woman with big smile and positive energy — escorted me to my room. Rosa obviously loved her job and enjoyed showing me all the amenities. I took full advantage of the down-time that my days at the Mahekal Resort offered. I spent some golden moments relaxing in my

hammock and sitting on my porch, looking out over the gorgeous grounds, the sandy beach, and the blue waters of the Mediterranean, which were only a few steps from my room.

I found the Mahekal Resort to be perfectly situated. One side of the resort borders the picturesque town of Playa del Carmen with all its amenities, restaurants, and shopping. The other side borders on a lovely beach along the sparkling Caribbean waters. You can walk along the beach to a ferry that will take you a short distance to the sunny beaches of nearby Cozumel island.

The resort has four swimming pools, four restaurants, and several bars, so it was never a long walk when I felt like a meal, a drink, or a swim. An ice-cream station serves ice cream cones and gelatos in a variety of flavors, plus toppings for make-it-yourself sundaes, coffee and espresso. A perfect treat at any time of day. Next to it is the resort's artisan boutique with handmade pottery, jewelry, clothing, and other authentic and unique Mexican gifts and souvenirs.

Families and couples can enjoy hanging out at the kid-friendly sports-bar area, called Bolis, which is next to the lobby where you will see big screen TV's playing sports games, a pool table, a ping pong table, and other games, plus a library. Across from Bolis, you will find my new favorite pasttime experience - the resort's artisan pottery hut, where I spent time engaged in creating a unique piece of pottery by painting it by-hand myself. I selected a two-piece candle holder which is all white except for the black lines that made accent flowers and leaves. I choose my color scheme and couldn't wait for the final product, as I leisurely painted away. The piece was then glazed, and the next day I picked up a perfectly beautiful object, possibly destined to become a genuine heirloom to be handed down for generations to come. It will certainly be an enduring memory of my trip. I was thrilled to have such a lovely piece of art that I had painted myself.

One of my favorite areas of the resort was where I would spend my mornings drinking coffee and fresh squeezed juices and eating at the breakfast buffet while over-looking the infinity pool and watching the waves roll in from the ocean



and the sun rise on the horizon. The breakfast buffet offered a perfect selection of delicious choices and options. In addition, you could always indulge in a mimosa or bloody mary from the bar.

Mahekal Resort provides a number of opportunities for guests, like me, who wish to mix adventure with their leisure time. Vida Aquática Dive Center, located on the beach, offers dive and snorkeling lessons plus expeditions to underwater caverns, called cenotes, and to nearby coral reefs. A highlight of my trip was an excursion to a nearby cenote.

Our tour guide Julio gave us some great historical information that I was unaware of as we drove to our destination in the air-conditioned bus. He told us that his grandmother was full-blooded Mayan, and I could tell he was passionate about his heritage. The cenote we were headed too had been discovered 20 years ago but and had been accessible to tourists for the past seven years. For some on the tour, it was intimidating and a little scary to take facemasks and snorkels in hand to descend into the earth in order to explore caverns with waterways connected to underground rivers. However, our cenote guide was a young man named Rodrigo, who had the most soothing voice that we agreed he should have his own podcast. Rodrigo was so reassuring that we probably would have followed him anywhere.

We walked down a staircase and then jumped into the water, which was a little chilly, at first, but felt refreshing after the

jungle-like humidity we had been experiencing. We explored a maze of underground waterways and beautiful caverns with towering pillars of stalactites and stalagmites. Some waterways were illuminated by overhead lighting, but we passed through others using the light of our guides flashlight. The beautiful aqua colored water was crystal clear. One cavern seemed magical because a tree surrounded by some vegetation was growing right in the middle of the cave which had a small opening letting the natural sunlight in. I took photos that I couldn't wait to share on social media!

I love adventure; however, I also enjoy the opportunity to pamper myself in between my daily adventures. My down-time experience reached a highpoint when I had a spa treatment at the resort's Revive Spa, which is a small building that blended into the tropical surroundings. I booked a facial which began by soaking in a hydrotherapy hot tub, and then I was escorted to a dimly lit room by Maricela, my aesthetician. She followed the normal luxury facial routine by massaging my face with cleansers and treatments, then rubbing my arms, hands, feet, legs, and scalp. Maricela had an amazing touch that was so gentle and soothing it nearly put me to sleep. Following the massage, I spent some time drinking tea in a separate relaxation room that was equipped with lounge chairs, soft lighting, natural wood accents, and a garden courtyard. I enjoyed every second and didn't want this experience to end,



until I got hungry that is.

Good food is an important part of any resort, however great food can linger in your memories forever. The Mahekal Beach Resort did a superb job of feeding my stomach and my senses on many levels, all of which were highly memorable. My room was near the Fuego Restaurante y Cantina where I started things off the first night with a five-course dinner. It began with Rockefeller Oysters on a rock salt filled plate with a flaming center. They were to die for! Fresh baked bread, handmade corn tortillas, and a variety of dipping sauces accompanied the meal. Four delectable courses later it concluded with an amazing dessert called a Chocolate Explosion. I was impressed to learn Fuego Restaurant only uses burning wood to cook and bake in their kitchen.

My next memorable experience was a lunch in which the chefs provided Mayan cooking lessons and cooked the traditional Mayan way under the ground in a cooking pit. The lessons began at the beach where the fishing boats had brought it the fresh catch-of-the-day. Guests can pick out their fish, and mine were taken to a private outdoor area mimicking how the Mayan's prepared their meals in a palapa thatch roofed hut. The center of the hut's floor is a pit in which food is cooked. We learned about achote, which is an orange-red ingredient made by grinding the seeds of the achiote tree and used to provide color to foods and to impart a distinct flavor and aroma, which some people describe as "slightly

nutty, sweet and peppery." The chefs demonstrated how they ground the achote seeds into powder then create a red flavorful sauce used in many dishes.

They then showed us how they prepared a fish entrée that they made in layers, like a lasagna. On a base of banana leaves, they sprinkled salt and pepper over the fish, added the sauce, and layered bell peppers, onions, and tomatoes on top of the sauce. They also add the aromatic maxan leaf for flavor. Then they did it all again with another set of layers. They sealed the finished dish with banana leaves, covered the whole thing with aluminum foil, put it on the hot coals in the cooking pit, and covered it with a metal plate. It took only about 20 minutes to cook and came out perfect. They served it with cilantro rice, fresh corn tortillas, and pickled red onions. They paired the dish with one of Mexico's amazing white wines.

The final meal was one of the top ten dining experiences I have enjoyed in a lifetime of appreciating fine food. They set up a five-course pairing dinner near the beach. The setting included an acoustic guitarist and singer, a bartender, and a beautiful table decorated with fresh-cut flowers. A sommelier introduced the local wine or tequila served with each course. One of the wines was a Syrah, which they call Shiraz, from Casa Madero, which was the first winery in the Americas, established at Parras, Mexico in 1597. Each of the wines was exceptional. A couple were fantastic! Mexico doesn't export its wines, so I had

no idea that Mexican wines, especially the reds, were of such high quality.

One of the highlights from the meal, which was stunning in presentation and taste, was a cream of carrot soup. We were given empty bowls made of coconut shells. The servers then poured the soup out of immense conch shells. The taste of the soup was so creamy and delicious. I, of course, had to pick up my shell and drink right out of it. I loved it, and I don't even like carrots.

Dessert was a final highlight. Hot chocolate was poured over a ball of chocolate (the size of a soft ball) inside of which was more chocolate, a white whipped cream and a little dry ice. As the hot liquid chocolate poured over the chocolate ball, the ball opened up like a flower blooming, and the chocolate contents became a lava type flow of bubbling delight. It was absolutely amazing! I don't know how many kinds of chocolate were present. There was light chocolate and dark, sprinkles and syrups. It was heaven.

That magnificent meal, served outdoors, near the beach, with the perfect ocean breeze, at a table illuminated by candles and torches, provided a first-class unique dining experience and also a dramatic conclusion to my trip.

Mahekal was magical! Someday, I'm going back. **110°**

For more information, go to www.mahekal-beachresort.com. Send comments about the article to editors@110mag.com.