

Meet Me in MEXICO

THREE WAYS TO ENJOY THE YUCATÁN PENINSULA.

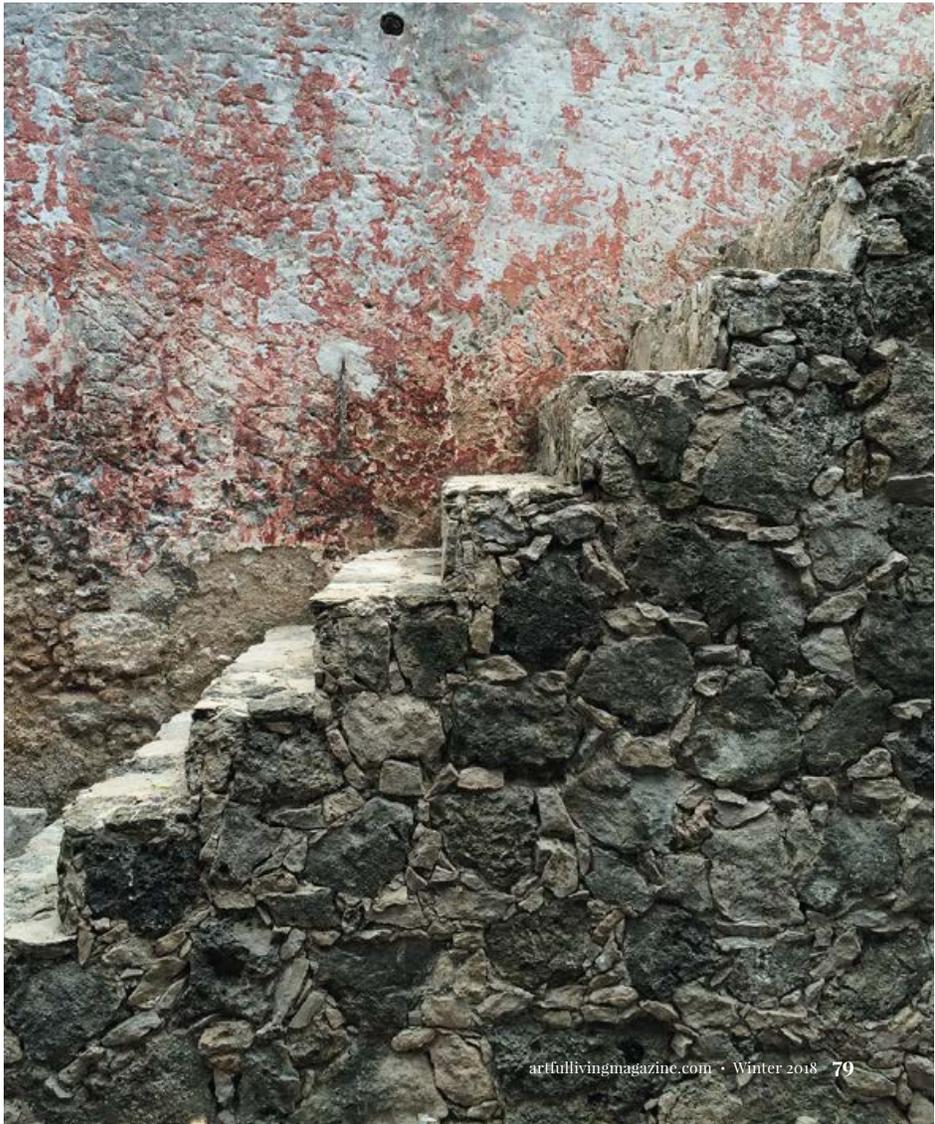
BY EMMA CUTLER

When it comes to vacationing in Mexico, sunbathing and tequila shots aren't the end of the road. With the Caribbean lapping at its eastern shore and the Gulf of Mexico to the north and west, the Yucatán Peninsula offers a different kind of escape, one rich in history, architecture and charm. During ancient times (and well into the early 20th century), the area was essentially cut off from the rest of the world, with few roads providing access to the peninsula. To this day, it remains a rich cultural oasis.

In the early 1500s, Spanish conquistadors divided themselves among three cities: Campeche, Mérida and Valladolid. They weren't able to penetrate the Caribbean coast, however, so the stretch known as the Riviera Maya doesn't have the same colonial charm of the old cities. Still, its beautiful white sand — stretching from the tip of the peninsula to Tulum and beyond — has its own appeal, attracting millions of visitors to its unspoiled beauty.



PHOTOGRAPHY BY EMMA CUTLER





MAHEKAL BEACH RESORT PLAYA DEL CARMEN

Mahekal Beach Resort is unlike any other property in Playa del Carmen. After a recent \$16-million update, it remains true to “old Playa” with a luxurious, bohemian feel. Upon arrival, guests are whisked away from busy Quinta Avenida to a calm, palm-shaded oasis with a 920-foot stretch of turquoise Caribbean shoreline.

Mahekal means “magical” in the still-spoken Mayan language, and the resort lives up to its namesake. It got its start half a century ago, when a family built six thatched-roof palapas for backpackers — long before Playa became a top travel destination and the fastest growing city in Latin America. It retains its authentic feel without the culturally appropriated gimmicks that often plague tourist areas. It’s sophisticated yet comfortable, with three expansive pools, a full-service spa and a beautiful beachfront that offers privacy for those who want it and mingling for those who don’t.

The property boasts a relaxed layout, featuring waterfront and jungle palapas. Locally made hammocks swing in the sea breeze. It feels like a home away from home, with spacious balconies, moon showers and private plunge pools. The cuisine here is excellent, and the interactive lunch at the Mayan Culinary Casita is exceptional. The experience incorporates traditional Mayan rituals, including a shaman blessing, and native ingredients such as annatto seeds and the super food *chaya*.

