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# Mahekal: Playa del Carmen relaxation, revelry

Whoever said you can't have your taco and eat it, too, never had the opportunity to stay at the Mahekal Beach Resort in Playa del Carmen. The beauty of Playa del Carmen is the lively, vibrant, frenetic environment of boisterous Quinta Avenida, combined with the sleepy, laid-back, beach-bum culture of Caribbean Mexico. The struggle, however, is finding a hotel that enables you to experience both at once. The Mahekal Beach Resort is the answer to the dilemma.

The sprawling resort, made up of charming bungalows, sits with its face to the sea and its back to Quinta Avenida, making the choice between town and country completely unnecessary. The collection of bungalows sits on a 920-foot stretch of sugary beach, set up with a Swiss Family Robinson vibe. The resort's history dates back about 50 years when a local family built six palapas on the beach for backpackers to rent. Since then the resort has evolved and grown into a laid-back, barefoot luxury environment, complete with open-air living rooms with throw pillows and candles sitting underneath strings of Edison bulbs.

From Oceanfront Beach Houses, complete with private plunge pools or outdoor showers, to Treehouse Rooms that overlook the jungle with hammocks on open-air terraces, there's a different vibe for every traveler. You won't find televisions in the room, but with Quinta Avenida literally just out the back of the hotel, you will hardly be starved for entertainment. Besides, the WiFi is reliable (and free), so streaming Netflix is an entirely viable option.

The resort has a variety of on-property restaurants that rival the eateries you'll find outside the resort, so if you intend to disappear into a complete resort experience it's entirely possible.

Las Olas Restaurant and Bar serves up regional specialties for breakfast, lunch and special dinner nights. Healthy breakfast options include egg white omelets, green juices and fresh smoothies.

The Cocina highlights cuisine from

across the Yucatan, Mexico and Latin America, with an extensive buffet showing off ceviches, steak with jalapeno chimichurri and yucca fries. The Fuego Restaurant and Cantina is a new oceanfront restaurant that was part of a \$16 million renovation; this restaurant is a true gem of the property. Order the fresh sashimi, which is bright, colorful and light. Keep in mind that the appetizers are large enough to be main courses on their own. The restaurant is known for its wood-burning oven, which churns out Yucatan-style sausage with red peppers, Caribbean grouper or Mexican octopus.

Another new offering at the resort is the Mayan Culinary Casita, which is tucked within a patch of jungle. This offers guests the opportunity to help Mayan chefs prepare a gourmet feast. A stone path takes diners through the gardens to the casita, where a Mayan shaman is waiting to burn incense and bless each guest before entering. Feast on fish *tikin xic* and a lime-and-chicken soup while sipping *xtabentun*, a potent Mexican liqueur.

The resort also has a 2,500-square-foot Revive Spa, which has a line of 100% organic products. Relax in the lounge areas while sipping Champagne or a freshly squeezed juice before heading to one of the palapa-style treatment rooms. The treatment to beat is the Revive 5 Senses, which incorporates massage with aromatherapy. A small fitness center is also available, though it's not as comprehensive as true fitness aficionados might want.



Clockwise from top, the Fuego Restaurant and Cantina, part of Mahekal Playa del Carmen's \$16 million renovation; the 2,500-square-foot Revive Spa offers a line of 100% organic products; an Oceanfront King Room.

An on-site dive center, the Vida Aquatica Dive Center, takes travelers of all experience levels on adventures, from exploring cenotes and snorkeling the reef to dive-training certification. There are also fishing tours and equipment rentals for paddleboarding, kayaking and snorkeling.

And when not indulging in the goodies on property, guests are at the doorstep of the nightlife and activity of Playa del Carmen. There are nightclubs like the Blue

Parrot and Canibal Royal, beach bars like the Lido Beach Club and restaurants like Catch and Cinco, both at the Thompson, and the divey local taco joint, El Fogon. Whatever vacation you're looking for, whether it be an energetic night on the town, a sleepy resort hideaway or a combination of both, the Mahekal Beach Resort has you covered.

Rates begin at \$387; visit [www.mahekalbeachresort.com](http://www.mahekalbeachresort.com).