



ESCAPE to NATURE

The sense of being surrounded by nature is the ultimate luxury of all. From the swaying of palm fronds to the whisper of the sea, a memorable escape awaits in Playa del Carmen, Mexico.

By Minerva Arboleya



Laid-back “raw” luxury is the first impression you get upon arriving at the Mahekal Beach Resort in Playa de Carmen, Mexico. The open-air, tiki-style lobby is surrounded by perfectly manicured tropical landscaping that guides you through the hand-laid, stone walkways from point “a” to point “b.” While the common areas are not air-conditioned, the fresh ocean breeze serves as a reminder that your vacation has indeed begun, and it’s time to trade in the hustle for the hammock. At this point, all anxieties are whisked away by the warm Caribbean air swirling through the lobby, as the whicker lanterns sway from the rustic wood dome overhead.

Nestled between the Riviera Maya and the beaches of Playa del Carmen is a haven of peace and tranquility where simplicity reigns. Panoramic views of the ocean from the private terrace of our bungalow penthouse villa made it difficult to leave our temporary home-away-from-home to explore the resort. The laid-back décor seen throughout the resort is reinforced by the presence of nature in detail after detail — from the understated elegance of the guest rooms to the touches of Mayan culture in the serenity spa.

When it came time for lunch, we ventured down to Las Olas, one of the poolside restaurants overlooking the beach. Some of their specialties include a variety of fresh ceviche dishes that were perfect for a hot afternoon, signature guacamole with fresh-baked tortilla chips, mojitos on ice, and the sound of crashing waves in the background.



Hotel lobby.



Fuego Restaurante y Cantina.

The Mahekal staff is keen on helping you enjoy every minute of your stay to the fullest, which for us included an afternoon of snorkeling in a nearby cenote with Roman, the resort's certified diving instructor. While originally from Germany, Roman has lived in Playa del Carmen for over 10 years and almost considers himself a local. Barbara, the dive-shop manager — also a transplant from Boston — was extra kind in preparing a “picnic” for our outing to the Mayan wilderness. Located in the Riviera Maya, our trip to the cenote — natural, underwater cave systems of crystal-clear fresh waters — made for an unforgettable and educational afternoon in the jungle among the Mayan gods.

After a day of activities and water sports, we made our way to the resort spa to begin unwinding for the evening. The serenity of the spa — with the copal incense burning in the background and the softly lit spaces — was instantly calming the moment we stepped foot inside the recently renovated, yet original, structure. The visit to the spa was reminiscent of being in a sacred sanctuary, a place of healing for mind, body,

and spirit. This sense of wholeness could easily become a ritual.

Just the name alone — Fuego Restaurante y Cantina (“fuego” translation is fire) — was a sign that dinner would be an unforgettable experience, and it was. Located right on the beach, Fuego is an open-air, chic, yet relaxed, dining experience to tantalize all your senses. The luxury of dining just steps from the ocean — with dim lights swaying from the overhead wicker lanterns and the scent of wood burning from the brick ovens — was only the beginning. Even the dishes bring you back to nature through their rustic presentations — some dishes are served on wood or marble slabs, balanced with the savory flavors of a gourmet experience. Interestingly enough, this open-air restaurant, surrounded by nature, also houses an open-air kitchen where aromas from the kitchen perfume the dining room in the most delightful way.

The personalized, hand-made, ceramic wall plaque placed at the entrance of our villa — as a unique parting gift from Mahekal to each guest — serves as a physical reminder of an unforgettable trip. **TM**

“Being surrounded by nature is the ultimate luxury.”

