

The Best of Cancún & the Yucatán

by David Baird & Shane Christensen

The Yucatán Peninsula welcomes more visitors than any other part of Mexico. Its tremendous variety attracts every kind of traveler with an unrivaled mix of sophisticated resorts, rustic inns, ancient Maya culture, exquisite beaches, and exhilarating adventures. Between the two of us, we've logged thousands of miles crisscrossing the peninsula, and these are our personal favorites—the best places to visit, the best hotels and restaurants, plus must-see, one-of-a-kind experiences.

1 THE BEST BEACH VACATIONS

- **Cancún:** In terms of sheer beauty, Cancún has always been the site of Mexico's most alluring beaches. The powdery, white-sand beaches are complemented by warm Caribbean waters the color of a Technicolor dream; it's so clear that you can see through to the coral reefs below. It's also one of the world's most popular entertainment destinations. Cancún offers Mexico's widest selection of beachfront resorts, with more restaurants, nightlife, and activities than any other resort destination in the country. See chapter 5.
- **Isla Mujeres:** If laid-back is what you're after, this island affords peaceful, small-town beach life at its best. Most accommodations are small, inexpensive inns, with a few one-of-a-kind, luxury places tossed in. Bike—or take a golf cart—around the island to explore rocky coves and sandy beaches, or focus your tanning efforts on the wide beachfront of Playa Norte. Here you'll find calm waters and *palapa* restaurants, where you can have fresh-caught fish for lunch. If all that tranquillity starts to get to you, you're only a ferry ride away from the action in Cancún. See chapter 6.
- **Cozumel:** It may not have lots of big, sandy beaches, but Cozumel has something the mainland doesn't: the calm, flat waters of the sheltered western shore. It's so calm that it's like swimming in a pool, only this pool has lots of fish, so take your snorkeling mask even if you don't plan to do any diving. See chapter 6.
- **Playa del Carmen:** This is one of our absolute favorite Mexican beach vacations. Stylish and hip, Playa del Carmen has a beautiful beach and an eclectic assortment of small hotels, inns, and cabañas. The social scene focuses on the beach by day and the pedestrian-only Quinta Avenida (Fifth Avenue) by night, with its fun assortment of restaurants, clubs, sidewalk cafes, and shops. You're also close to the coast's major attractions, including nature parks, ruins, and cenotes (sinkholes or natural wells). Enjoy it while it's still a manageable size. See chapter 7.

- **Tulum:** Fronting some of the best beaches on the entire coast, Tulum's small *palapa* hotels offer guests a little slice of paradise far from the crowds and megaresorts. The bustling town lies inland; at the coast, things are quiet and

remain so because all these small hotels must generate their own electricity. If you can pull yourself away from the beach, there are ruins to marvel at and a vast nature preserve to explore. See chapter 7.

2 THE BEST CULTURAL EXPERIENCES

- **Exploring the Inland Yucatán Peninsula:** Travelers who venture only to the Yucatán's resorts and cities miss the rock-walled inland villages, where women wear colorful embroidered dresses and life seems to proceed as though the modern world (with the exception of highways) didn't exist. The adventure of seeing newly uncovered ruins, deep in jungle settings, is not to be missed. See chapter 8.
- **Street & Park Entertainment in Mérida:** Few cities have so vibrant a street scene as Mérida. Throughout the week you can catch music and dance performances in plazas about town, but on Sunday, Mérida really gets going—streets are closed off, food stalls spring up everywhere, and you can enjoy a book fair, a flea market, comedy acts, band concerts, and dance groups. At night, the main plaza is the place to be, with people dancing to mambos and rumbas in the street in front of the town hall. See chapter 8.
- **San Cristóbal de las Casas:** The city of San Cristóbal is a living museum, with 16th-century colonial architecture and pre-Hispanic native influences. The highland Maya live in surrounding villages and arrive daily in town wearing colorful handmade clothing. A visit to the villages is a window into another world, giving visitors a glimpse of traditional Indian dress, religious customs, churches, and ceremonies. See chapter 9.
- **Regional Cuisine:** A trip to the Yucatán allows for a culinary tour of some of Mexico's finest foods. Don't miss specialties such as *pollo* or *cochinita pibil* (chicken or pork in savory *achiote* sauce), great seafood dishes, the many styles of *tamal* found throughout Chiapas and the Yucatán, and Caribbean-influenced staples such as fried bananas, black beans, and yucca root. For a glossary of popular regional dishes, see Appendix A.

3 THE BEST ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES

- **Calakmul:** Of the many elegantly built Maya cities of the Río Bec area, in the lower Yucatán, Calakmul is the broadest in scope and design. It's also one of the hardest to reach—about 48km (30 miles) from the Guatemalan border and completely surrounded by jungle (actually, the Calakmul Biological Reserve). Calakmul is a walled city with the tallest

pyramid in the Yucatán—a city whose primary inhabitants are the trees that populate the plazas. Go now, while it remains infrequently visited. See “Side Trips to Maya Ruins from Chetumal” in chapter 7.

- **Tulum:** Some dismiss Tulum as less important than other ruins in the Yucatán Peninsula, but this seaside Maya





fortress is still inspiring. The stark contrast of its crumbling stone walls against the clear turquoise ocean just beyond is an extraordinary sight. See “Tulum, Punta Allen & Sian Ka’an” in chapter 7.

- **Uxmal:** No matter how many times we see Uxmal, the splendor of its stone carvings remains awe-inspiring. A stone rattlesnake undulates across the facade of the Nunnery complex, and 103 masks of Chaac—the rain god—project from the Governor’s Palace. See “The Ruins of Uxmal” in chapter 8.
- **Chichén Itzá:** Stand beside the giant serpent head at the foot of the El Castillo pyramid and marvel at the architects and astronomers who positioned the building so precisely that shadow and sunlight form a serpent’s body slithering from peak to the earth at each equinox (Mar

21 and Sept 21). See “The Ruins of Chichén Itzá” in chapter 8.

- **Ek Balam:** In recent years, this is the site where some of Mexico’s most astounding archaeological discoveries have been made. Ek Balam’s main pyramid is taller than Chichén Itzá’s, and it holds a sacred doorway bordered with elaborate stucco figures of priests and kings and rich iconography. See “Ek Balam: Dark Jaguar” in chapter 8.
- **Palenque:** The ancient builders of these structures carved histories in stone that scholars have only recently deciphered. Imagine the magnificent ceremony in A.D. 683 when King Pacal was buried deep inside his pyramid—his tomb unspoiled until its discovery in 1952. See “Palenque” in chapter 9.

4 THE BEST ACTIVE VACATIONS

- **Scuba Diving in Cozumel & Along the Yucatán’s Caribbean Coast:** The coral reefs off the island, Mexico’s premier diving destination, are among the top five dive spots in the world. The Yucatán’s coastal reef, part of the planet’s second-largest reef system, affords excellent diving all along the coast. Diving from Isla Mujeres is quite spectacular. Especially beautiful is the Chinchorro Reef, lying 32km (20 miles) offshore from Majahual or Xcalak. See chapters 6 and 7.
- **Fly-Fishing off the Punta Allen & Majahual Peninsulas:** Serious anglers will enjoy the challenge of fly-fishing the saltwater flats and lagoons on the protected sides of these peninsulas. See “Tulum, Punta Allen & Sian Ka’an” and “Majahual, Xcalak & the Chinchorro Reef” in chapter 7.
- **Cenote Diving on the Yucatán Mainland:** Dive into the clear depths of the Yucatán’s cenotes for an interesting twist on underwater exploration. The Maya

considered the cenotes sacred—and their vivid colors do indeed seem otherworldly. Most are between Playa del Carmen and Tulum, and dive shops in these areas regularly run trips for experienced divers. For recommended dive shops, see “Cozumel” in chapter 6, and “Playa del Carmen” and “South of Playa del Carmen” in chapter 7.

- **Birding:** The Yucatán Peninsula, Tabasco, and Chiapas are ornithological paradises. Two very special places are Isla Contoy, with more than 70 species of birds as well as a host of marine and animal life (p. 122), and the Huitepec Cloud Forest, with its flocks of migratory species (see p. 272).
- **An Excursion to Bonampak & Yaxchilán:** Bonampak and Yaxchilán—two remote, jungle-surrounded Maya sites along the Usumacinta River—are now accessible by car and motorboat. The experience could well be the highlight of any trip. See “Road Trips from San Cristóbal” in chapter 9.

5 THE BEST PLACES TO GET AWAY FROM IT ALL

- **Isla Mujeres:** Isla Mujeres in low season is about as low-key as you can get. You'll find an ample selection of hotels and restaurants, and they're as laid-back as their patrons. Here life moves along in pure *mañana* mode, with little sign of the bustling commercialism that exists just across the bay. Visitors stretch out and doze beneath shady palms or languidly stroll about. In fact, Isla Mujeres feels worlds removed from Cancún, yet remains comfortably close for those who choose to reconnect. See "Isla Mujeres" in chapter 6.
- **The Yucatán's Riviera Maya:** Away from the busy resort of Cancún, a string of quiet getaways, including Paamul, Punta Bete, and a portion of Xpu-ha, offer tranquillity on beautiful beaches at low prices. See "North of Playa del Carmen" and "South of Playa del Carmen" in chapter 7.
- **Tulum:** Near the Tulum ruins, about two dozen beachside *palapa* inns offer some of the most peaceful getaways in the country. This stretch just might offer the best sandy beaches on the entire coast. Life here among the birds and coconut palms is decidedly unhurried. See "Tulum, Punta Allen & Sian Ka'an" in chapter 7.
- **Rancho Encantado Cottage Resort** (Lago Bacalar; www.encantado.com): The attractive *casitas* are the best place to unwind at this resort, where hammocks stretch between trees. The hotel is on the shores of placid Lago (Lake) Bacalar, south of Cancún near Chetumal, and there's nothing around for miles. But if you want adventure, you can head out to the lake in a kayak, follow a birding trail, or take an excursion to Belize and the intriguing Maya ruins on the nearby Río Bec route. See p. 181.
- **Hotel Eco Paraíso Xixim** (Celestún; www.ecoparaiso.com): In these crowded times, space is a luxury that's getting harder to come by. Space is precisely what makes this place so great: Fifteen bungalows and 5km (3 miles) of beach bordering a coconut plantation. Throw in a good restaurant, a pool, and a couple of hammocks, and you have that rare combination of comfort and isolation. See p. 216.
- **Hacienda San José Cholul** (www.luxurycollection.com): Operated by Starwood Hotels, this hacienda is only an hour east of the bustling city of Mérida, toward Izamal, but it feels like another world. The quiet, unhurried manner of both guests and staff, and the beautiful tropical surroundings make it the perfect place to recoup some of the silence and slow time lost to the modern world. See "Haciendas & Hotels" on p. 200.

6 THE BEST MUSEUMS

- **Museo de la Cultura Maya** (Chetumal; ☎ 983/832-6838): This modern museum, one of the best in the country, explores Maya archaeology, architecture, history, and mythology. It has interactive exhibits and a glass floor that allows visitors to walk above replicas of Maya sites. See p. 182.
- **Museo Regional de Antropología** (Mérida; ☎ 999/923-0557): Housed in the Palacio Cantón, one of the most beautiful 19th-century mansions in the city, this museum showcases local archaeology and anthropological studies in handsome exhibits. See p. 211.

- **Museo Regional de Antropología Carlos Pellicer Cámara** (Villahermosa; ☎ 993/312-6344): This anthropology museum addresses Mexican history in the form of objects found at archaeological sites, with particular emphasis on the pre-Hispanic peoples of the Gulf coast region. See p. 252.
- **Parque–Museo La Venta** (Villahermosa; ☎ 993/314-1652): The Olmec,

considered Mexico's mother culture, are the subject of this park/museum, which features the magnificent stone remains that were removed from the La Venta site not far away. Stroll through a jungle setting where tropical birds alight, and examine the giant carved stone heads of the mysterious Olmec. See p. 253.

7 THE BEST SHOPPING

Some tips on bargaining: Although haggling over prices in markets is expected and part of the fun, don't try to browbeat the vendor or bad-mouth the goods. Vendors won't bargain with people they consider disrespectful unless they are desperate to make a sale. Be insistent but friendly.

- **Resort Wear in Cancún:** Resort clothing—especially if you can find a sale—can be a bargain here. And the selection may be wider than what's available at home. Almost every mall on the island contains trendy boutiques that specialize in locally designed and imported clothing. The best is La Isla Shopping Center. Less expensive local fashions are widely available in the original downtown known as El Centro. See “Shopping” in chapter 5.
- **Duty-Free in Cancún:** If you're looking for European perfume, fine watches, or other imported goods, you'll find the prices in Cancún's duty-free shops (at the major malls on the island and in downtown Cancún) hard to beat.
- **Quinta Avenida, Playa del Carmen:** This pedestrian-only street offers leisurely shopping at its best—no cars, no

hassle. Simply stroll down the street and let your eye pick out objects of interest. Expect a good bit of merchandise popular with counterculture types, such as batik clothing and fabric, Guatemalan textiles, and inventive jewelry and artwork. But you'll also find quality Mexican handicrafts, premium tequilas, and Cuban cigars. See “Playa del Carmen” in chapter 7.

- **Mérida:** This is *the* marketplace for the Yucatán—the best place to buy hammocks, *guayaberas*, Panama hats, and Yucatecan *huipiles*. See “Exploring Mérida” in chapter 8.
- **San Cristóbal de las Casas:** Deep in the heart of the Maya highlands, San Cristóbal has shops, open plazas, and markets that feature the distinctive waist-loomed wool and cotton textiles of the region, as well as leather shoes, handsome pottery, and Guatemalan textiles. Highland Maya Indians sell direct to tourists from their armloads of textiles, dolls, and attractive miniature likenesses of Subcomandante Marcos—complete with ski masks. See “San Cristóbal de las Casas” in chapter 9.

8 THE HOTTEST NIGHTLIFE

Although, as expected, Cancún is the source of much of the Yucatán's nightlife, that resort city isn't the only place to have

a good time after dark. Along the Caribbean coast, beachside dance floors with live bands and extended happy hours in

seaside bars dominate the nightlife. Here are some favorite hot spots, from live music in hotel lobby bars to hip techno dance clubs.

- **Cancún:** Longstanding Cancún favorites **Carlos 'n' Charlie's** and **Dady'O** offer potent drinks, hot music, and wild (if sometimes sloppy) dance floors. For a more cosmopolitan setting, **La Madonna** is a fashionable martini bar and restaurant in the La Isla Shopping Village, while **Bling**, with its outdoor terrace overlooking the lagoon, is the city's most chic cocktail venue. See chapter 5.
- **Forum by the Sea:** This seaside entertainment center in Cancún has it all: a dazzling array of dance clubs, sports bars, fast food, and fine dining, with shops open late as well. You'll find plenty of familiar names here, including the Hard Rock Cafe and Rainforest Cafe. It's also the home of what remains Cancún's hottest club, **CoCo Bongo**, which regularly packs in up to 3,000 revelers. See p. 113.
- **The City:** One of Cancún's hottest nightclubs, the City is a raging day-and-night club, offering a Beach Club with a pool, beach activities, and food and bar service, and the sizzling Club, at which the world's top DJs have spun through the night until the sun once again rises over the turquoise waters. This is truly a City that never sleeps. See p. 113.
- **Quinta Avenida (Playa del Carmen):** Stroll along lively, pedestrian-only Fifth Avenue to find the bar that's right for you. With live-music venues, tequila bars, sports bars, and cafes, you're sure to find something to fit your mood. See p. 146.
- **San Cristóbal de las Casas:** This city, small though it may be, has a live-music scene that can't be beat for fun and atmosphere. The bars and clubs are all within walking distance, and they're a real bargain. See "San Cristóbal de las Casas" in chapter 9.

9 THE MOST LUXURIOUS HOTELS

- **Aqua** (Cancún; www.feel-aqua.com): This is the trendiest resort in Cancún, a privileged spa-retreat for the urban jet-set. Completely rebuilt after having been destroyed by Hurricane Wilma, Aqua features spacious oceanview rooms, eight beachfront pools, an invigorating spa, world-class cuisine, and exceptional service. See p. 92.
- **Royal** (Cancún; www.realresorts.com.mx): The Royal is a stunning all-inclusive, adults-only resort in which luxury abounds, from the sprawling infinity pools and gorgeous beach to the gourmet restaurants and sophisticated spa. The elegant marble lobby looks out one side to the Caribbean and the other to the lagoon, and the guest suites offer every conceivable amenity, including two-person Jacuzzis. Guests in the top-category suites have access to BMW Mini Coopers. The all-inclusive package includes gourmet meals, premium drinks, and evening entertainment. See p. 97.
- **JW Marriott** (Cancún; www.jwmarriottcancun.com): This gorgeous resort affords elegance without pretense, combining classic and Caribbean styling with warm Mexican service. The inviting free-form infinity pool extends to the white-sand beach, and families feel just as comfortable here as romance-seeking couples. The hotel includes a spectacular 3,250-sq.-m (35,000-square-foot) spa. See p. 94.

- **Ritz-Carlton Cancún** (Cancún; www.ritzcarlton.com): For years, thick carpets, sparkling glass and brass, and rich mahogany have surrounded guests at this hotel, the standard-bearer of luxury in Cancún. The service is impeccable, leaving guests with an overall sense of pampered relaxation. Its restaurants are among the best in the city. See p. 96.
- **Presidente InterContinental Cozumel** (Cozumel; www.intercontinentalcozumel.com): Surrounded by shady palms, this hotel also has the best beach on the island, right in front of Paraíso Reef. Favorite rooms are the deluxe beachside units with spacious patios and direct access to the beach—you can even order romantic in-room dining on the patios, complete with a trio to serenade you. See p. 141.
- **The Tides Riviera Maya** (north of Playa del Carmen; www.tidesrivieramaya.com): Small, secluded, and private, the Tides offers extraordinary personal service and spa treatments. Rooms are spread throughout the jungle, and there's a beautiful seaside pool and restaurant. See p. 151.
- **Maroma** (north of Playa del Carmen; www.maromahotel.com): You can't ask

for a better setting for a resort than this beautiful stretch of Caribbean coast with palm trees and manicured gardens. You'll start to relax before you even take the first sip of your welcome cocktail. Service is very attentive, and the rooms are large and luxurious. See p. 151.

- **Hacienda Xcanatún** (outskirts of Mérida; www.xcanatun.com): With its large, boldly designed suites built with extravagance in mind, sprawling grounds, private spa, excellent restaurant, and ample staff, this hotel masters the difficult trick of being compact in size but expansive in offerings. See "Haciendas & Hotels" on p. 200.
- **Hacienda Puerta Campeche** (Campeche; www.luxurycollection.com): Not a hacienda at all, really, this gorgeous hotel was created out of several adjoining colonial houses. This makes for a large property (especially for having only 15 rooms), with an open area in back featuring a pool and tropical gardens under ancient crumbling walls. From any vantage point the hotel is beautiful—both in overall layout and design details. And the service is impeccable. See p. 234.

10 THE BEST INEXPENSIVE INNS

- **Rey del Caribe Hotel** (Cancún; www.reycaribe.com): An inexpensive retreat in downtown Cancún, this hotel has considered every detail in its quest for an organic and environmentally friendly atmosphere. Set in a tropical garden, the Rey del Caribe provides sunny rooms, warm service, yoga and meditation classes, and healthful dining—all a welcome respite from party-hearty Cancún. See p. 99.
- **Hotel Colonial** (Campeche; ☎ 981/816-2222): Okay, so it's not the most comfortable hotel in town, but it is by

far the most endearing. It exudes character and a sense of timelessness that relaxes the spirit and transports guests to an uncomplicated era. And for \$25, it's a steal. See p. 234.

- **Casa San Juan Bed & Breakfast** (Mérida; www.casasanjuan.com): This B&B, in a colonial house in Mérida's historic district, is the perfect combination of comfort and character at a great price. The guest rooms in the original building evoke an earlier time, while the modern rooms in back are quite large and border a lovely patio. See p. 203.

- **Hotel Real del Valle** (San Cristóbal; ☎ 967/678-0680): In a city of inexpensive lodgings, this beats all the other

bargain hotels for its combination of location, room size, and service. See p. 275.

11 THE BEST UNIQUE INNS

- **Casa de los Sueños** (Isla Mujeres; www.casadelosuenosresort.com): This B&B steeped in vibrant colors seems to descend into the cool Caribbean Sea. Its small, but well-appointed, spa “Zenter,” which is also accessible to nonguests, offers yoga classes, massages, and holistic spa treatments, which take place either outdoors or in a tranquil indoor space. See p. 123.
- **Hotel Villa Rolandi Gourmet & Beach Club** (Isla Mujeres; www.villarolandi.com): In addition to being steps away from an exquisite private cove, a tranquil infinity pool, and Isla’s finest restaurant, this intimate inn also pampers guests with every conceivable in-room amenity. Each unit even has a private Jacuzzi on the balcony and a shower that converts into a steam room. Guests are offered free transportation from Cancún via the hotel’s private yacht. See p. 123.
- **Deseo Hotel + Lounge** (Playa del Carmen; www.hoteldeseo.com): Perhaps it should be Hotel = Lounge. That might be an overstatement, but the lounge is

at the center of everything, making Deseo the perfect fit for outgoing types who are into an alternative lodging experience. Enjoy a cocktail at the bar or on one of the large daybeds and chill to the modern, er, lounge music. See p. 157.

- **Casa Mexilio** (Mérida; www.casamexilio.com): An imaginative arrangement of rooms around a courtyard features a pool surrounded by a riot of tropical vegetation. The rooms are divided among different levels for privacy and are connected by stairs and catwalks. Breakfast here provides an extra incentive for getting out of bed. See p. 202.
- **Casa Na-Bolom** (San Cristóbal de las Casas; www.nabolom.org): This unique house-museum is terrific for anthropology buffs. Built as a seminary in 1891, it was transformed into the headquarters of two anthropologists. The 12 guest rooms, named for surrounding villages, are decorated with local objects and textiles; all rooms have fireplaces and private bathrooms, and the room rate includes breakfast. See p. 269.

12 THE BEST RESTAURANTS

Best doesn’t necessarily mean most luxurious. Although some of the restaurants listed here are fancy affairs, others are simple places to get fine, authentic Yucatecan cuisine.

- **Gustino** (Cancún; ☎ 998/848-9600): The JW Marriott’s signature restaurant is a gourmand’s paradise, with fresh seafood, steaks, and homemade pastas prepared in the open kitchen using classic

Italian ingredients. The beautiful dining room makes this one of the city’s most romantic places to dine. See p. 102.

- **Labná** (Ciudad Cancún; ☎ 998/892-3056): Steep yourself in traditional Yucatecan culture at this downtown eatery, which showcases Maya cuisine and music. The Labná Special samples four of the region’s best dishes, including baked suckling pig with guacamole. See p. 105.

- **La Habichuela** (Ciudad Cancún; ☎ 998/884-3158): In Cancún's original downtown, this gourmet seafood restaurant is a romantic retreat off the beaten path. An expert waitstaff attends to the diners seated in the restaurant's lovely garden patio. See p. 104.
- **Thai** (Cancún; ☎ 998/144-0364): This enchanting Thai restaurant offers a handful of secluded tables in individual *palapas* over the lagoon. The waterfront setting provides a romantic backdrop to the classic and contemporary Thai cuisine. Plus, the restaurant's chill-out lounge makes for a perfect before or after dinner drink. See p. 103.
- **100% Natural for Licuados**: This casual eatery serves terrific breakfasts and healthy snacks throughout the day. Come for one of the *licuados*, drinks made from fresh fruit mixed with water or milk. The chain offers a wide selection, including innovative mixtures such as the Cozumel (spinach, pineapple, and orange) and the Caligula (orange, pineapple, beet, celery, parsley, carrot, and lime juices)—a healthy indulgence. Cancún has several branches. See p. 105.
- **Casa Rolandi** (Isla Mujeres; ☎ 998/877-0700): This exquisite restaurant attached to the Casa Rolandi boutique hotel serves the island's finest cuisine. The open-air establishment sits adjacent to the Caribbean and offers wonderful fresh fish, seafood, and pastas. See p. 126.
- **Cabaña del Pescador** (Cozumel; no phone): If you want an ideally seasoned, succulent lobster dinner, Cabaña del Pescador (Lobster House) is the place.

If you want anything else, you're out of luck—lobster dinner, expertly prepared, is all it serves. When you've achieved perfection, why bother with anything else? See p. 142.

- **Prima** (Cozumel; ☎ 987/872-4242): The Italian food here is fresh, fresh, fresh—from the hydroponically grown vegetables to the pasta and garlic bread. And it's all prepared after you walk in, most of it by owner Albert Domínguez, who concocts unforgettable shrimp fettuccine with pesto, crab ravioli with cream sauce, and crisp house salad in a chilled bowl. See p. 142.
- **Media Luna** (Playa del Carmen; ☎ 984/873-0526): The inviting atmosphere of this sidewalk cafe on Quinta Avenida is enough to lure you in. The expertly executed and innovative menu, together with great prices, makes it one of the top choices on the Caribbean coast. See p. 161.
- **Yaxché** (Playa del Carmen; ☎ 984/873-2502): No restaurant in the Yucatán explores the region's culinary traditions and use of local ingredients more than this one. Its menu presents several pleasant surprises and is a welcome relief from the standard offerings of most Yucatecan restaurants. See p. 160.
- **La Pigua** (Campeche; ☎ 981/811-3365): Campeche's regional specialty is seafood, and nowhere else will you find seafood like this. Mexican caviar, coconut-battered shrimp, and chiles stuffed with shark are just a few of the unique specialties. Thinking about La Pigua's pompano in a fine green herb sauce makes me want to start checking flight schedules. See p. 235.