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Mexico's Yucatán Peninsula





# YUCATÁN PENINSULA

(Mileage is estimated from each preceding city or site. Before you begin your trip, please note: For space reasons, we could not provide the most detailed map with this brochure. We recommend the use of a detailed map in conjunction with this guide.)

## CANCÚN INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT

Begin your Yucatán travels by flying into Cancún, the gateway for the entire region.

### 10.5 miles

**CANCÚN**— It was a government study and a computer program that decided that Cancún was an ideal place for an international Caribbean resort back in 1967. The city was literally carved out of the jungle, and it's now a place of luxury hotels, shopping malls, restaurants and nightclubs. More vacationers come here than to any other part of Mexico, attracted by the white-sand beaches, turquoise waters, that nonstop nightlife and the nearby Mayan ruins. The action is

concentrated on the Isla Cancún, a narrow 14-mile island connected to the mainland by two bridges. Sure, you can lie in the sand under a "palapa" or thatched roof shelter at Cancún. But there's great diving and snorkeling here and at nearby Isla Mujeres.

### 102 miles

**VALLADOLID**— The third largest city on the peninsula, Valladolid is where the Spanish built the Yucatán's first ecclesiastical buildings in 1552. Both the Iglesia de San Bernardino de Siena and the adjoining Ex Convento de Sisal have been restored and are worth seeing. As in most Mexican towns, the "zócalo," or main square, which in Valladolid is called the Parque Francisco Cantón Rosado, is the liveliest part of town. Mayan women sell pottery, leather goods and the embroidered blouses known as "huipiles." The restaurants that face the square do a brisk business. And the Palacio Municipal, which overlooks the square, can provide you with some insight into local Mayan history.

### 63 miles

**RÍO LAGARTOS**— You drive north to the fishing village of Río Lagartos, binoculars in hand, to see huge colonies of pink flamingos as well as more than 260 species of other birds, including egrets, cormorants and herons. The ideal way to see the wildlife is to hire a boat and guide for a few hours to take you out onto the lagoons.

### 93 miles

**CHICHÉN ITZÁ**— Chichén Itzá is the most-visited archaeological site on Mexico's Yucatán Peninsula. And no wonder, since it is arguably the best-preserved Mayan site of all. This city held more than 13,000 people in its 13th-century heyday.

Among the most impressive sites is the observatory, known as El Caracol, or "the snail," for its spiral staircase.

The building called the Nunnery was

probably a palace, while the ballcourt is the largest such court in Mesoamerica. Players used a 12-pound rubber ball in life-and-death games similar to those played in the Rome Colosseum. Above all of Chichén Itzá, El Castillo, or "the castle," towers. You should make the trek to the top of this 79-foot-high pyramid for the best view of the site.

### 74 miles

**MÉRIDA**— There's a French influence in the Yucatán, and it's best seen in Mérida, a place of colonial buildings and wrought-iron balconies. Locals as well as tourists resort to riding in horse-drawn carriages past the Beaux-Arts palaces that line the Paseo de Montejo. The Palacio Cantón is worth a short visit, since it's now an anthropology museum rich with Mayan finds. But with its courtyards, markets and evening concerts outside the Palacio Municipal, Mérida has a lively outdoor life that is entertainment itself.

### 61 miles

**CELESTÚN**— Situated on a peninsula and ringed with beaches, Celestún's real attraction lies in its estuary, where you'll find thousands of flamingos. The easiest way to see them is to hire a small boat from town for a 20-minute boat ride down Río Celestún to the flamingo preserve, passing storks, egrets and blue herons.

### 79 miles

**UXMAL**— Uxmal is where you can see the full flowering of the Puuc style of Mayan architecture. Dating from about the 7th to the 10th century AD, Puuc is known for its detailed stone mosaic masks that usually depict gods. The very word "Uxmal" means thrice-built, and many structures were built over existing ones. The Governor's Palace, with its arches and hooked noses of the rain god, Chac, is considered a masterpiece of Puuc architecture. The so-called Magician's Pyramid is the tallest building, at 115 feet, and is the most imposing of Uxmal's buildings. Legend has it that it was built in a single night by a dwarf with magical powers. More sober observers have concluded that it was built from the

6th to the 10th centuries. Reflect on the pyramid's origin as you climb the vertigo-inducing stairs to the top.

**PUUC ROUTE**— The Puuc hills offered a protective shelter for the Maya. The settlements in this area date from 600 to 900 AD. The sites of Kabah, Sayil, Xlapak and Labná boast the dramatic architectural style known as Puuc.

### 14.5 miles

**KABAH**— Dating from about 850 to 900 AD, Kabah was the closest Mayan settlement to Uxmal. The highlight of a visit to Kabah is Codz Pop, a palace festooned with more than 250 carved masks representing the rain god Chac with his distinctive hooked nose. In an exceptionally dry area, honoring the rain god was an obvious priority.

### 5.5 miles

**SAYIL**— The three-tiered palace of Sayil, which was built around 730 AD, lies at the heart of a community that once numbered more than 8,000 people. Like a visit to its Roman counterpart, Pompei, Sayil offers several excavated homes that reveal the day-to-day life of the Maya.

### 3 miles

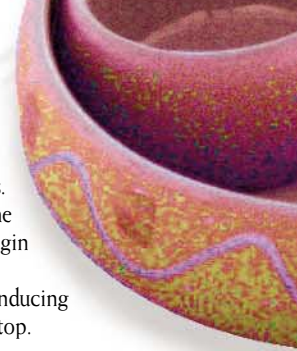
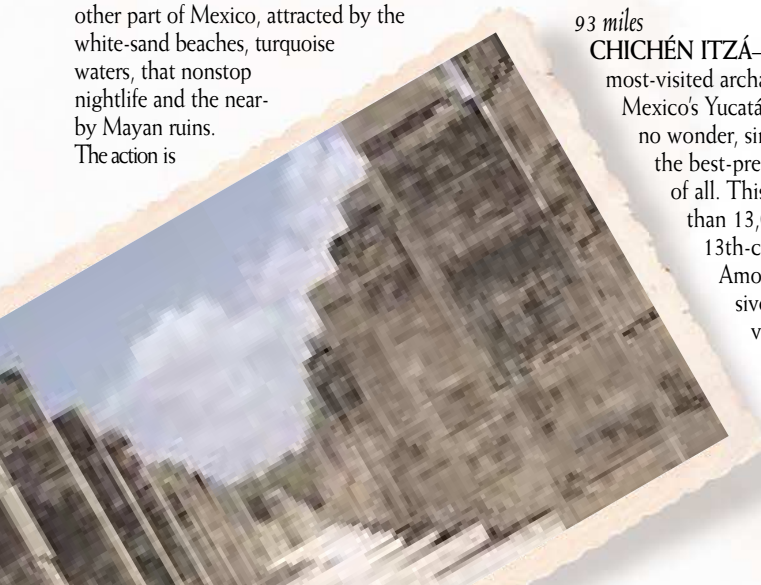
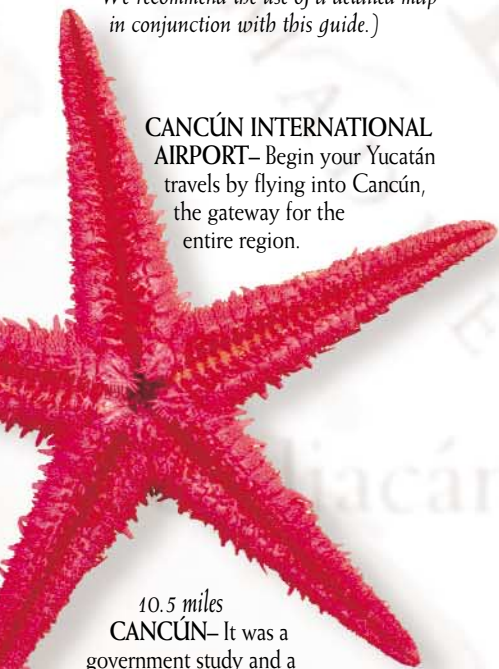
**XLAPAK**— The palace at Xlapak is a visual delight, with masks of the rain god, Chac, above its entrance.

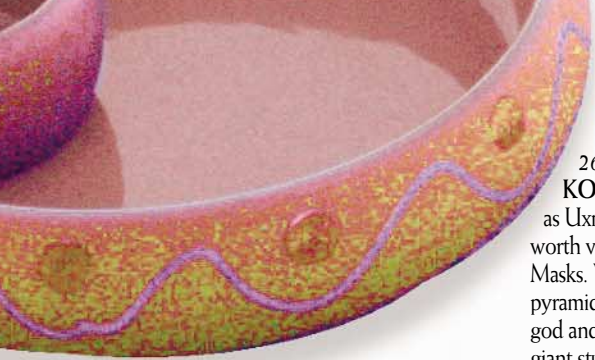
### 2.5 miles

**LABNÁ**— One of the best examples of Mayan architecture at Labná is called El Mirador, the observatory. Then carry on to the two-story palace, which has a classic Puuc frieze of masks and latticework. And don't miss the Temple of Columns, which is also covered with a striking frieze.

### 8 miles

**GRUTAS DE LOLTÚN**— The longest cave system in the Yucatán, Loltún is a vast underground area of grottoes that has long been an archeologist's and

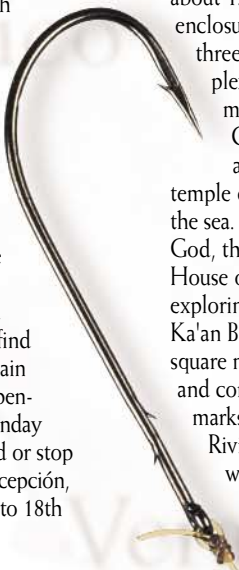




anthropologist's delight. But these caves are also open to guided tours. The remains of bison and mammoth have been found here, as evidence of Ice Age settlement. There are also wall paintings depicting humans and animals. The caves' large stalagmites and stalactites are where the name Loltún, which means "stone flowers," comes from.

**90 miles**  
**EDZNÁ**— Founded around 600 BC, the Gran Acropolis is the main complex in Edzná. It's dominated by the Edificio de los Cinco Pisos, or "Building of the Five Levels." The Templo de los Mascarones or "Temple of the Masks" is also worth exploring.

**64 miles**  
**CAMPECHE**— The charm of this city is its colonial architecture. Built in 1540 on the site of a former Mayan fishing village, it became the Yucatán's most important colonial port. It was attacked many times and eventually became a walled city. These walls were strengthened with bastions, known as "baluartes." Seven of them remain, and they've been transformed. For example, the Baluarte de Santiago is now a walled garden, while the Baluarte de la Soledad is a museum exhibiting Mayan "stelae," carved upright stone slabs placed at ritual sites. Be sure and explore Calle 59, a street that has some wonderfully painted colonial houses. Eventually, you'll find yourself in Parque Principal, the main square, and you can jump on an open-sided tram for a tour, listen to a Sunday afternoon concert in the bandstand or stop at the Catedral La Inmaculada Concepción, whose construction spans the 16th to 18th centuries.



**264 miles**

**KOHUNLICH**— While not as grand as Uxmal or Chichén Itzá, Kohunlich is worth visiting just to see the Temple of Masks. Walk up the steps of the 6th-century pyramid that's dedicated to the Mayan sun god and you'll get a close-up view of the giant stucco masks that are aligned to face the setting sun. Several hundred other structures, mounds and stelae can also be found in the surrounding jungle.

**28 miles**

**CHETUMAL**— The capital of the state of Quintana Roo, Chetumal is near the Belize frontier. Because of its duty-free port status and proximity to the border, it's a colorful place filled with visitors from neighboring Belize and Guatemala. One of the most compelling sites is the Museo de la Cultura Maya, which offers some insight into daily Mayan life. Chetumal's wide, tree-lined avenues are made for strolling, and you can watch the passing parade at La Bandera Square, where Sunday concerts are held. Boulevard Bahía along the waterfront is where to find a café later on.

**134 miles**

**TULUM**— With a stunning cliff-top location overlooking the Caribbean, Tulum is a late Mayan site that dates from about 1200 AD. The word "tulum" means enclosure, and indeed, a wall runs along three sides of the site. Inside is a complex of temples and palaces. The most dramatic of them all is El Castillo, "the castle," with a wide and steep stairway that rises to a temple on top. It commands a view over the sea. But the Temple of the Descending God, the Temple of the Frescoes and the House of the Cenote are all worth exploring. South of Tulum is the Sian Ka'an Biosphere Reserve, some 1,700 square miles of protected jungle, marsh and coral reefs. Tulum, by the way, marks the beginning of the so-called Riviera Maya, which stretches all the way to Playa del Carmen.

**49 miles**

**PLAYA DEL CARMEN**— Less than 30 years ago, Playa del Carmen was a fishing village with a deserted beach. It's now the fastest growing city on the coast. While the beach is still an alabaster-white delight, it's become a boom town for hotels and tourists. But if you walk north from the ferry pier, you'll find the more traditional (and quieter) parts of town.

## HOTELS

**Ikal Del Mar Villa Resort & Spa.** These private villas built of native wood and stone overlook 8 miles of pristine beach some 30 miles from Cancún. You can dine on Mediterranean and Yucatán specialties. Plata Xcalacoco, Riviera Maya, Quintana Roo.  
Tel: 51 713 528 7863  
Fax: 51 713 528 3697  
For reservations in the USA: 800 525 4800.

**Hacienda Katanchel.** This 740-acre resort is surrounded by luxurious gardens and jungle, and each of the 39 suites has a private plunge pool. The hotel's Casa de Máquinas restaurant is renowned for its Mayan-inspired cuisine. Km 26, Highway 180, Mérida, Yucatán.  
Tel: 52 99 23 40 20  
Fax: 52 99 23 40 00  
For reservations in the USA: 800 525 4800.

**Maroma.** A secluded luxury hideaway surrounded by 200 acres of jungle, with 36 rooms and suites. Maroma is about serenity, hammocks and sea breezes. Breakfast on your terrace, lunch on the beach and have dinner by candlelight. Hwy. 307, Km 51, Punta Maroma, Quintana Roo.  
Tel: 52 998 8728200  
Fax: 52 998 8728220

**Las Ranitas.** The names translates to "The Froggies," reflecting the sense of humor of the French owners. This 17-room beach-side hotel uses wind-generated electricity, solar energy and recycled water. Rooms are decorated with tile and fabric from Oaxaca, and there's a pool and tennis court. Road



to Sian Ka'an, Tulum, Quintana Roo.  
Tel: 52 998 426082  
Fax: 52 998 730934

## Hotel Hacienda Uxmal.

Minutes from Uxmal, this simple colonial-style hotel has 82 rooms and a pool surrounded by tropical gardens. Yucatán cuisine is served in the candle-lit dining room. Uxmal, Yucatán.  
Tel: 997 976 20 12  
Fax: 997 976 20 11  
For reservations in the USA: 800 235 4079.

**Villa Rolandi Gourmet & Beach Club.** Situated on Isla Mujeres off Cancún, this is a luxurious Mediterranean-style resort. Rooms boast marble baths, ocean views and jacuzzi on private terraces. Fracc. Laguna Mar SM7, Isla Mujeres, Quintana Roo.  
Tel: 52 987 70700  
Fax: 52 987 70100  
For reservations in the USA: 800 525 4800.

## RESTAURANT

**Hacienda Teya.** A few minutes outside of Mérida is the Hacienda Teya, a restored 17th-century hacienda surrounded by gardens. They serve authentic Yucatán cuisine in a formal, romantic setting. Hacienda Teya. Km. 12.5 Carretera Mérida - Cancún, Kanasín, Yucatán.  
Tel: 99 28 50 00

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