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SO MUCH GOOD,  
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# FINDING YOUR YUCATÁN ESCAPE

BY CAROLYN O'NEIL

WITH SO MANY PLACES TO STAY IN MEXICO'S QUINTANA ROO, PICK THE ONE THAT HAS THE RIGHT VIBE FOR YOUR VACATION.

The bustling Cancún International Airport is a happy hive of travelers, with half of them enjoying “just one more” margarita before reluctantly flying home and the other half arriving with that first margarita in mind, eager to begin their vacations along the Caribbean coast of Mexico's Yucatán Peninsula.

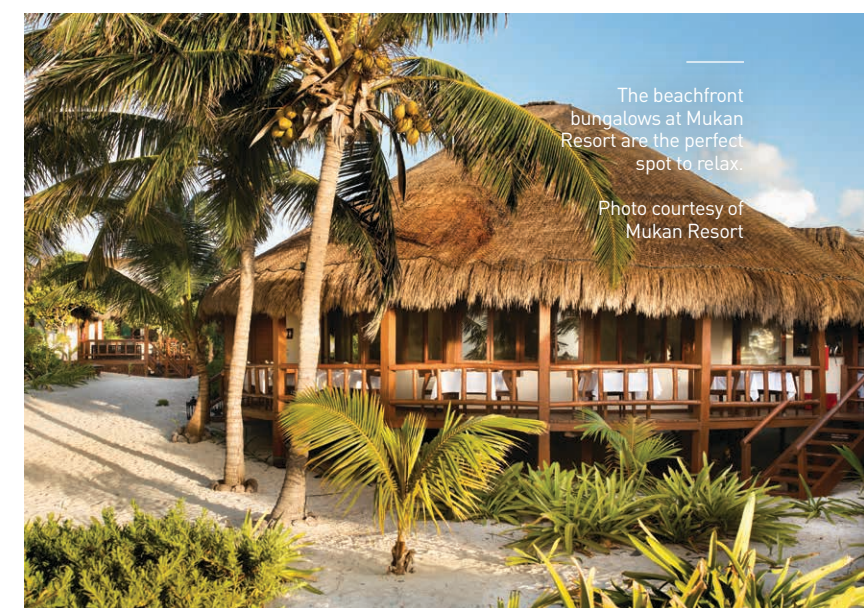
More than twenty million visitors come each year for the sunny allure of white sand and blue waves bordered by flower-filled jungles alive with the sound of birds and the whispers of ancient Mayan history. The party-town nightlife in Cancún attracts some, but others travel a bit farther, drawn by the serenity and natural beauty of this peninsula that separates the Gulf of Mexico from the Caribbean Sea.

While all the resorts and hotels in the Yucatán offer a healthy dose of sunshine and hospitality, their styles are as varied as the guests who choose them. Here is a look at two welcoming properties with distinctly different charms:

## A REMOTE RESORT ON A NATURAL PRESERVE

*MUKAN RESORT, SOUTH OF TULUM*

The final leg of the journey to Mukan Resort begins as you step onto a speedy motor launch and set a course through the mangrove-lined channels across the San Felipe Lagoon. Wildlife abounds as fish jump and birds take flight, greeting guests who've chosen this intimate getaway tucked into the natural setting of the Sian Ka'an Biosphere Reserve, a UNESCO World Heritage Site.



The beachfront bungalows at Mukan Resort are the perfect spot to relax.

Photo courtesy of Mukan Resort

The Grand Velas Riviera Maya resort in Mexico's Yucatán Peninsula offers luxury, beauty, and a host of activities for its guests.

Photo courtesy of Grand Velas Riviera Maya

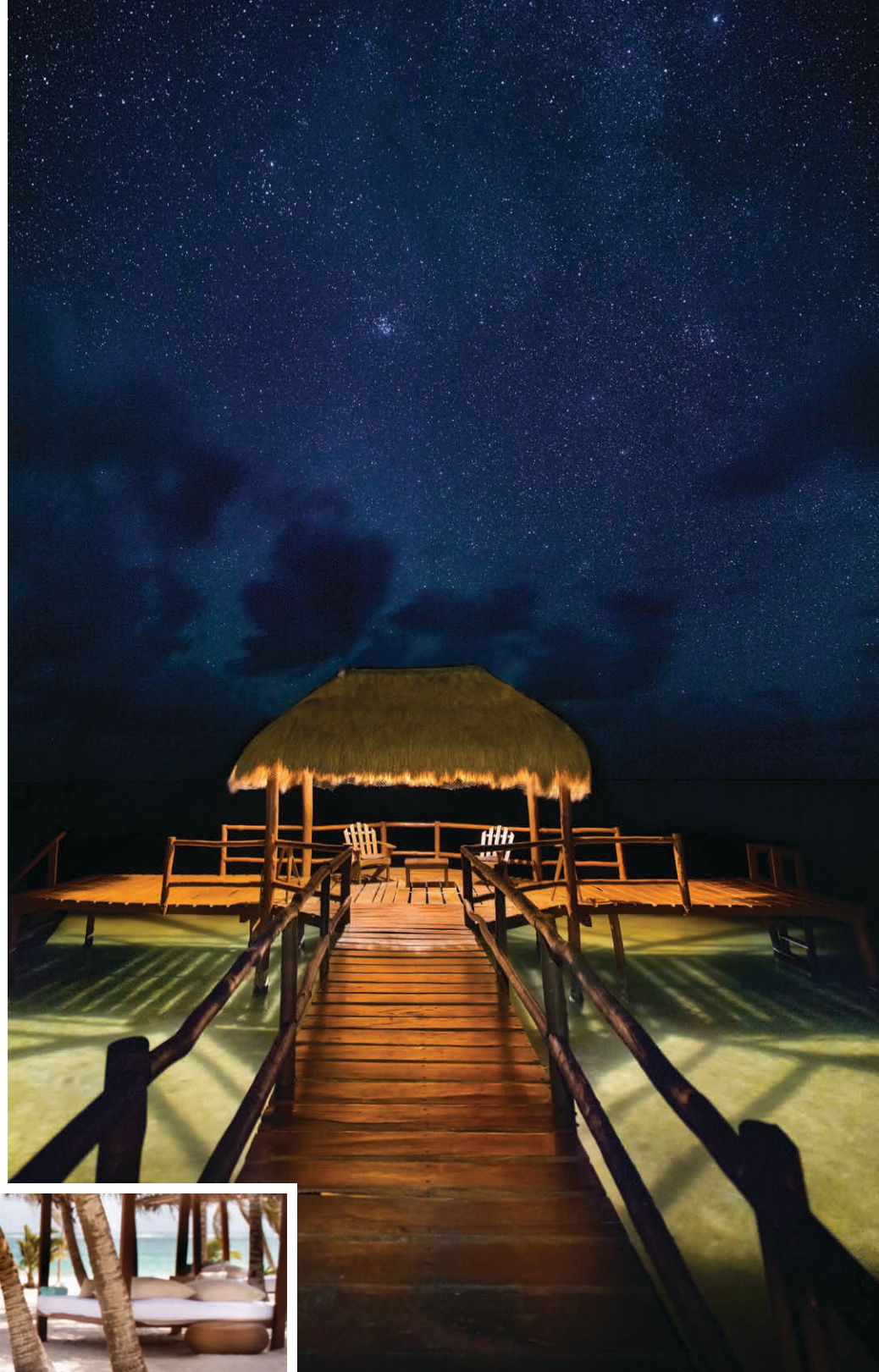


Mukan may be off the beaten path by road and sea, but laid-back luxury and seamless service await guests here. Nine spacious rooms with soothing island-style decor are either tucked into the breezy main villa or in beachfront bungalows. The only decision to make is which shoes *not* to wear, as guests go barefoot on soft sand and make plans to spend their days swimming, snorkeling, kayaking, and fly-fishing or perhaps just relaxing in the shade of a beach cabana with a pile of books, listening to the waves, and sipping from a freshly cut young coconut. Of course, you can choose a combination of both solitude and adventure. The twenty-plus staff members at Mukan are ready to organize everything from a boat tour to scout for sea turtles and dolphins with ice-cold beer on board or, back at the beach, an alfresco bottle of champagne on ice with artfully prepared fresh seafood ceviche, just-baked tortilla chips, and the best guacamole you've ever tasted. Or maybe after a morning yoga class, you'd prefer a colorful vegetarian ceviche with a revitalizing green juice made with cactus leaves, celery, pineapple, and a hint of ginger!

The meals at Mukan unfold with as much beauty as the lush scenery, with tables set under the palms day and night. Locally caught fish, grilled lobster, slow-cooked pork, and tender beef tacos are prepared with inspiration from the traditions of Mayan cuisine. There's a different ceviche every day and a parade of fresh salsas



BREAKFAST IS ONE OF THE BEST REASONS TO RISE FROM YOUR CANOPIED BED TO GREET THE DAY.



as hot or as mild as you like. Breakfast is one of the best reasons to rise from your canopied bed to greet the day. From quesadillas with chorizo and Oaxaca cheese to huevos rancheros with avocado, the morning meal is served with handmade tortillas and a rainbow of tropical fruits. To add even more local flare to the vacation vibe, there's a selection of wonderful wines from Mexico's Baja to discover—or how about a tasting of fine tequilas while toasting to the sunset from the rooftop terrace?

There's more relaxation served with a selection of massages offered by spiritually guided therapists. Choose your Zen setting either in the quiet spa or on the shaded deck overlooking the lagoon.

Even as you unplug, it's good to know that Wi-Fi is available and there is a flat-screen smart TV in each room. There's also a large-screen television in the main villa's sleek, all-white living room, perfect for enjoying a must-see sporting or entertainment event. (During my visit our little group gathered to watch the Academy Awards with celebratory after-dinner drinks and delicious desserts.)

Every view—from beach to bungalow—is a postcard of nature. The presence of a wind turbine and solar panels on the resort are indications that the owners of Mukan are invested in protecting this remote and unique oasis of Yucatán beauty and calm.

VISIT [MUKAN.COM](http://MUKAN.COM) TO LEARN MORE OR BOOK YOUR TRIP!



## GRAND RESORT ON A GLISTENING BEACH

GRAND VELAS RIVIERA MAYA

From the moment you enter the impressive white walls and gates edged by shimmering blue pools, you know you're in for something special. The Grand Velas Riviera Maya in Playa del Carmen is a destination in itself, with over two hundred private acres of Yucatán jungle meeting manicured gardens and the sleek Mayan pyramid-inspired architecture of a 540-suite resort overlooking the deep blue Caribbean. This all-inclusive property offers three unique accommodation experiences: the Zen Grand set in the lush tropical jungle; the family-friendly beachfront Ambassador; and the adults-only Grand Class, with plunge pools on private terraces and a tranquil infinity pool on the edge of the sea. Each suite is beautifully designed for relaxing with plenty of space (1,100 square feet or larger) and a twenty-four-hour personal concierge to take care of your vacation wish list, from frozen drinks at the pool to a hot stone massage at the spa. (Pool concierges will stop by to polish your sunglasses, and beach concierges will bring you a chilled towel.)

At the not-to-be-missed Grand Velas Spa, step out of the Mexican sun to be greeted with an icy orange blossom-scented face towel and refreshing water flavored with lemon and strawberry.

*Above:* The Zen Grand at Grand Velas is set in a jungle oasis ideal for rest and meditation.

Photo courtesy of Grand Velas Riviera Maya

*Opposite top:* Stargazing from the Yucatán beaches is sure to be a wondrous experience.

*Opposite bottom:* From healthy options like fresh green juices and salads to authentic tacos and more, dining at Mukan Resort is never disappointing.

Photos courtesy of Mukan Resort



Voted best spa in the world by Virtuoso, the spa at Grand Velas is a holistic wellness escape like no other, with forty treatment rooms that have tranquil views and the soothing sound of water everywhere. The Water Journey hydrotherapy circuit takes guests through various water-based experiences, from steam sauna to clay room to frozen room (sparkling with iridescent tiles) and on to the welcome warmth of a dry sauna, the joy of a water-bubble bed, and more in the circuit of pools within the spa. Water lovers can dive even deeper into the Yucatán’s aquatic history by organizing a day trip to the area’s brilliant blue natural cave pools called cenotes.

Grand Velas takes the all-inclusive promise seriously so guests can truly unwind and experience food and beverage luxury. Suites are stocked with complimentary snacks, coffee, water, soft drinks, premium wines, top-shelf liquors, and, as this is Mexico, Don Julio tequila!

Need some suggestions on the best ways to enjoy tequila or mescal? Sign up for a mixology class to learn all about the magic of the blue agave plant.

The dining scene here is an adventure in local and world cuisines at the highest level. Cocina de Autor (Author’s Kitchen) is the first restaurant at an all-inclusive resort to hold the coveted AAA Five Diamond Award. The elegant menu is a gastronomic tour often featuring guest chefs from around the globe, many of whom are from Michelin-starred restaurants.

The seven restaurants on property are varied in their culinary focus, from Frida, celebrating the rich cultural heritage of all Mexico, to Sen Lin for Asian fusion dinners. Guests craving Italian cuisine after a busy day burning calories in the surf can head to Lucca for seafood risotto with an Italian Chianti. Or if traditional French fare is what you’re looking for, an evening at Piaf is in order. For a delicious lesson in the taste traditions of Mayan cuisine, head to Chaka.

Special culinary-themed events are held at Grand Velas throughout the year, so travelers who prioritize food and wine experiences should check the calendar for what’s coming up at this resort.

Meanwhile, mornings begin by greeting the sun and enjoying a breakfast extravaganza at Azul, offering relaxed seating inside or on the beachside open-air terrace. The buffet is beyond fabulous with everything from freshly pressed tropical fruit juices to a

multicolored macaron bar. Of course, there are eggs made to order, pancakes, waffles, and all the rest, but don’t miss the warm tortillas with avocado and salsa—the best kind of avocado toast! What’s for lunch? Don’t be surprised if a tent pops up along the beach and chefs start grilling seafood they just caught a few feet offshore. The Grand Velas Riviera Maya is indeed a food lover’s paradise. Now, how about another mango margarita? ▀

START YOUR TASTY VOYAGE  
BY PLANNING ONLINE AT  
[RIVIERAMAYA.GRANDVELAS.COM](https://www.rivieramaya.grandvelas.com).

*Carolyn O’Neil is an Atlanta-based food writer who specializes in culinary travel and healthy lifestyles. She believes travel is the ultimate way to learn about people of the world, and cuisine is the most exciting way to learn about their history and culture. Find her blog at [TheHappyHealthyKitchen.com](https://TheHappyHealthyKitchen.com).*

The beachfront Ambassador is Grand Velas Riviera Maya’s ultimate family getaway with luxurious pool, private balconies (right), kids’ club, and beach games.

Photos courtesy of Grand Velas Riviera Maya

Award-winning spa services at Grand Velas range from meditation to a variety of massages, healing rituals, hydrotherapy, and more.

Photo courtesy of Grand Velas Riviera Maya

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