



TRAVEL GUIDE



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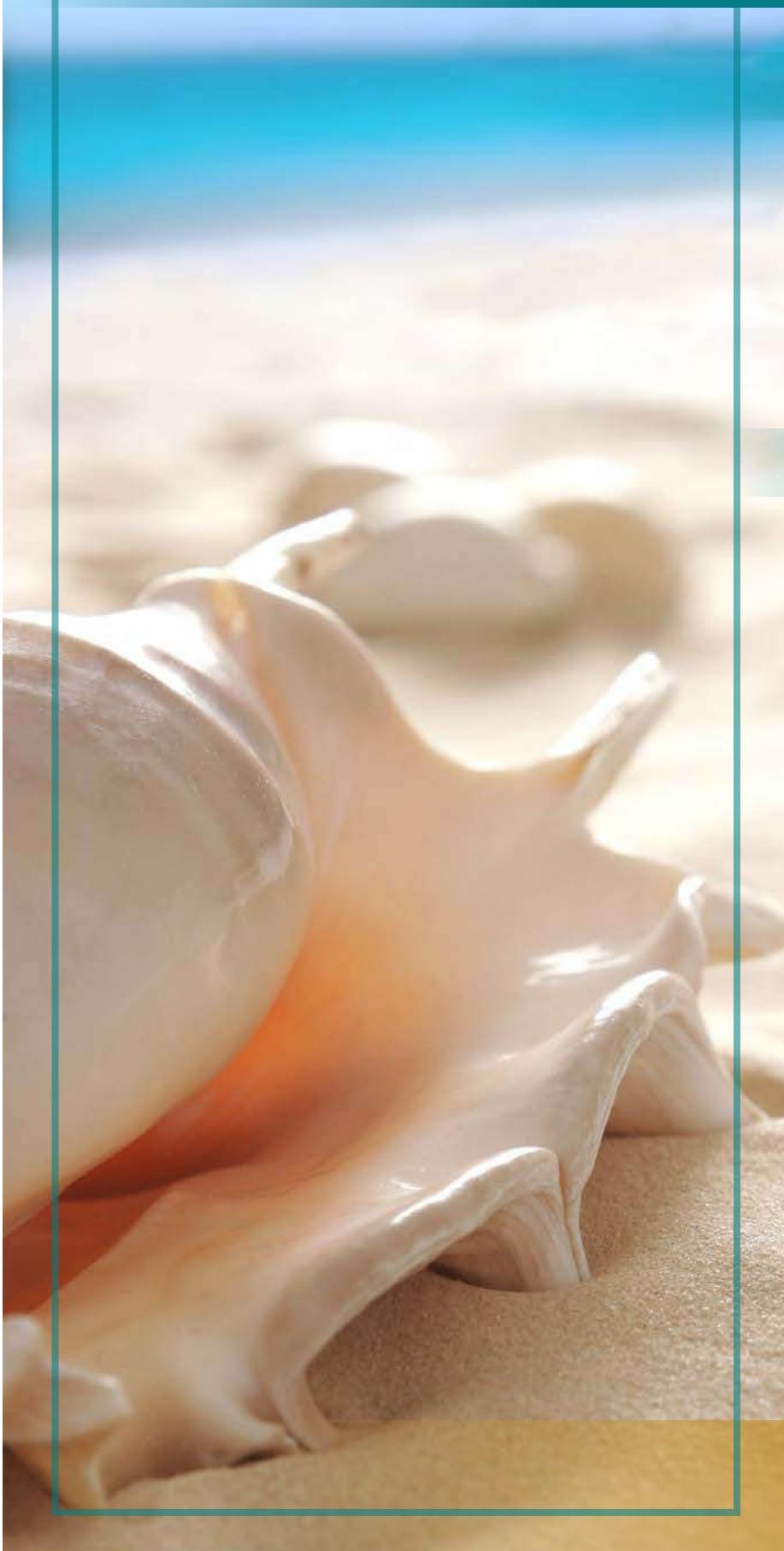
Costa Maya is located on the south of the Quintana Roo state and has many locations to choose from: a typical Caribbean enclave like Chetumal, a Magic Town like Bacalar, beautiful beaches like Mahahual and Xcalak and amazing Mayan sites such as Chacchoben or Kohunlich.



Blessed with an unbeatable combination of tropical forest, wetlands, white-sand beaches, coral reefs, abundant wildlife and magnificent archaeological sites, Grand Costa Maya has long been one of Mexico's best-kept secrets. This is an ideal place for adventure lovers as well as for people who loved Mayan culture, since several communities in here have preserved timeless traditions.



HOW TO GET TO GRAND COSTA MAYA



By Air

The International Airport of Chetumal lies just 2 km. from the city and offers a daily flight to Mexico City (95 minutes).

You can also arrive by private plane flying from Cancun, Cozumel and Playa del Carmen.

By Car

Chetumal is easily accessible by road from most cities in the state with a modern, safe and convenient highway, so you can get around by car rental or you can take a bus from Cancun, Playa del Carmen and Tulum. From Cancun, the drive is roughly 4 hours and pretty direct following highway 307 South. The route passed through numerous small towns of the Riviera Maya and Felipe Carrillo Puerto.

From the city of Belize, you take the road to the Santa Elena border bridge, passing through Orange Walk and Corazal, and crossing the border take the Federal Highway 307.

From Mérida, take the Highway 184 passing through the archaeological sites of Mayapan and Acanceh, and take the junction to the Puuc Route and the town of Tekax, until you connect with the Federal Highway 307.

A good paved road connects Chetumal with other Southeastern states like Chiapas, Tabasco or Campeche, Mexico's Federal Route 186 traverses southern half of the Yucatán between Escárcega and Chetumal, passing through the archaeological sites of Calakmul, Balam Ku, Xpuhil and Rio Bec.



TIP



A classic and delicious dessert in Chetumal is the "Machacado", a sort of crushed sweet ice. It is made with natural fruit, which can be bananas, pineapple, papaya, watermelon, mamey, zapote, nanche or peach. You have to try it!

The City of Chetumal is the small, quaint and relatively young capital of the state of Quintana Roo. Chetumal comes from Cha' temàal that means "Place of the Red Wood", in Maya and it was founded in 1898 with the name Payo Obispo.

It has a Caribbean flavor featuring many small English-style wooden houses and is a very enjoyable destination with countless attractions. You will find culture, history, and natural beauty as well as gentle and kind people. The city offers accommodation, tourist attractions and restaurants to suit all tastes and budgets, and it offers well-connected roads and an airport.

The Boulevard Bahia in Chetumal goes along the waterfront and is the longest in the entire Yucatan Peninsula. Walk along the Boulevard will be delightful during the day and night, you will discover some of the most significant landmarks in Chetumal like the monuments of the Fisherman, the Manti and the one which represents the renaissance of Chetumal after the pass of the hurricane "Janet".

This is the perfect place to enjoy the beautiful sunrises and sunsets, as well as great meal with an incredible view.

The colorful architecture of Chetumal will transported you back in time, while you walk though the streets of this beautiful Caribbean town.

WHAT TO SEE IN CHETUMAL



Boulevard Bahía

It runs around Chetumal Bay with a nice view of the Bay. You can run, stroll or tour this peaceful area by bicycle enjoying the many cafes, restaurants, parks and the fresh sea breeze.

Monumento del Pescador

The Monument to the fisherman is a landmark located in Boulevard Bahia, a perfect spot for a souvenir picture with family. The inscription in the monument quotes "Chetumal. Here is where Mexico begins". A fountain and a wooden corridor surround it.

Chetumal's Architectural Landscape

After Hurricane Janet, the city was rebuilt combining the modern style and the so-called "Old Chetumal", with houses in romantic English colonial



style. Colored wooden houses and corrugated metal roof, reminiscent of the architecture of the Bahamas or Jamaica, characterize the streets of Chetumal.

Parque "El Renacimiento"

It is a nice park with a sculpture named "Renaissance", because it represents the revival of the city after the devastation of Hurricane Janet in 1955. Nearby are a shopping center and the Palace of Justice building.

Casa de la Crónica

The House of the Chronicle is a nice place to hang out offers you with articles and pictures regarding the history of the city. It is located inside the Cayman Park.

Explanada a la Bandera

It is the first monument built in



Chetumal and is located in front of the Government Palace. This monument commemorates the defense of the country when Mexico declared war on Germany and it has a white obelisk with a clock and two golden eagles in each side.

Payo Obispo Scale Model

This is a remarkable, outsized scale model of the former Payo Obispo, reconstructed from the memories of old residents with the charming wooden Caribbean-style houses. Hours: Tuesday to Sunday from 9:00 to 19:00 hrs.

International Business and Convention Center of Chetumal

The modern complex features business center, commercial spaces, kitchens, service areas, dressing

Payo Obispo Zoo

The Park encompasses 11,000 hectares and is home to reptiles, birds, butterflies and mammals of the region. Enclosures in the zoo are designed to mimic the natural habitats where the animals live in, and you can walk along enormous mahogany and ceiba trees that reach heights of up to 50 feet. Horse rides are available at the zoo, as well as tour guides. Children can feed the birds and the fish. Hours: Wednesday to Sunday from 10:00 to 16:00 hrs.



rooms and all the services to meet all needs for events, exhibitions and fairs.

Museum of the city of Chetumal

The museum was founded to preserve the history of Chetumal. It is located in a unique architectural complex known as the Cultural Center of Fine Arts. It has six rooms with a splendid decoration showing the history of the city, with its English colonial air, including the Mayan civilization, the Caste War and other crucial events in the history of Chetumal, like the hurricane "Janet". The museum offers workshops and classes year round,

as well as a magnificent open-air auditorium known as the Minerva Theater. Hours: Tuesday to Saturday 9:00 to 19:00 hrs. Sundays 9:00 to 14:00 hrs.

Planetarium Yook' Oi Kaab It features an astronomical observatory with an 16-inch telescope, the most powerful in the Mexican southeast; a solar clock; an auditorium with capacity to hold up to 190 people; and two rooms, one with a permanent exhibition that shows the Mayan Cosmology and the other for temporary exhibitions related with the universe. It also has a 12-m dome housing a Digistar 4

system with two peripheral projectors. Planetarium Show Schedule: Tuesday to Friday 18:00 hrs. Saturdays and Sundays 12:30, 15:30, and 18:00 hrs.

Mural Pictórico del Congreso (Congress Mural)

This is a large mural created by Elio Carmichael on the ceiling and wall called "Form, Color and History". The paintings depicted the history of the city since the creation of the Maya according to the legend of the Popol Vuh (sacred book of the Maya) until the "Caste War" in the mid-19th century.

Museum of the Mayan Culture

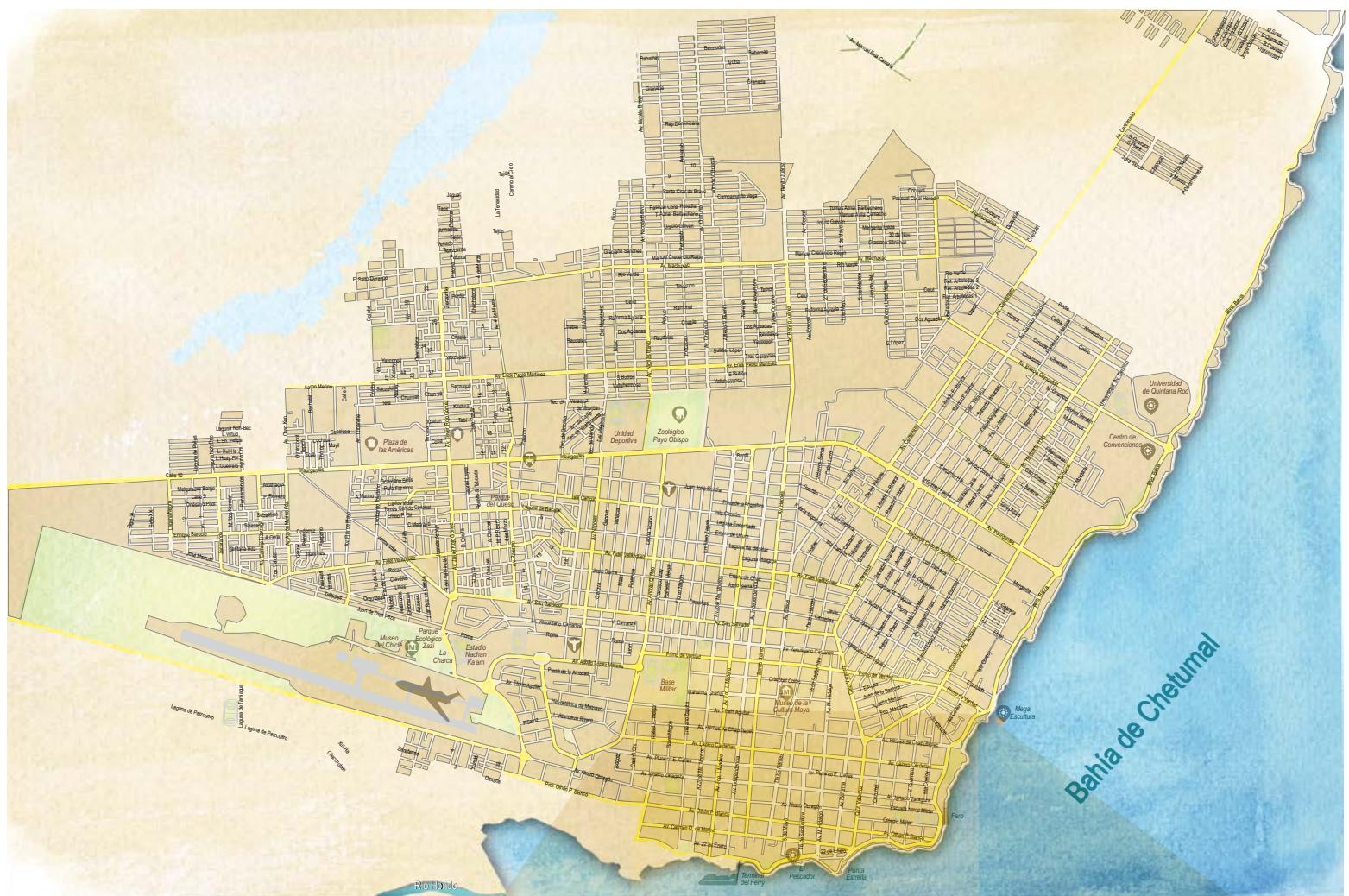
The displays and models provide a fascinating insight into the Mayan cosmology. The museum was opened in 1993 and it is unique in its kind in Latin America. The first floor represents the roots of the tree where the Maya underworld named Xibalba reigns. The middle floor is the tree trunk, known as Earth, home to humans and all their trappings. The top floor is the leaves and branches and the 13 heavens of the cosmic world. This distributed around a central courtyard flanked by tall and wide corridors that provide access to the different rooms.

The exhibition shows the daily way of life and the religions practiced by the Mayans. There are many scale models of famous archeological sites, reproductions of murals and many artifacts. There is a crafts store, a bookshop and a temporary exhibition room.



Hours: Tuesday to Saturday 9:00 to 19:00 hrs. Sundays 9:00 to 14:00 hrs. In the museum's courtyard is a Na (thatched hut) with implements of daily Maya life on display like gourds and grinding stones.

MAP OF CHETUMAL



Symbols

- Shopping Mall
- Bus station
- Ferry
- Hospital
- Market
- Museum
- Point of interest
- Zoo



CHETUMAL BAY



The beautiful Chetumal Bay has coastal lagoons, islands and extensive mangrove systems. The emerald green waters shelter a rich and diverse wildlife.

Along the bay you can get a glimpse of the ancient Mayan culture, as well as some constructions of the colonial times. There is also a nice resort with restaurants offering unforgettable seafood dishes and a beautiful spot where a stream feeds the stunning Milagros Lagoon.

Calderitas

The nearby village of Calderitas, located just 15 minutes from Chetumal, is the place where you ought to go if you want to enjoy some good food right by the water; you will find several restaurants on a deck along the water's edge with beach huts. A bit further up the coast from the restaurants there is a trailer park if you want to spend the night, there is also a hotel, boat rides and kayak rentals.

Tamalcab Island

The 6 miles long and few hundred meters wide island is located only a little more than a mile far from the coast of Calderitas. It is a beautiful island lined with white beaches where the clear offshore waters are

perfect for aquatic sports. This is the perfect spot for people who love fishing and snorkeling, one of the best in the region. The island is home to spider monkeys, coati, agouti, osprey and several varieties of heron. There are also some vestiges of the Mayan culture.

Raudales

It is located just over one mile from the Guerrero Lagoon. It is in conjunction with a river that comes from Bacalar Lagoon, a nice place for camping. During the weekends and the vacation season there are several restaurants. You can also rent kayaks and take boat rides. This is one of the best birding locations in the area.



Guerrero Lagoon

Part of the interconnecting backwaters of the Chetumal Bay, is about 4 miles long. Beside the lagoon is the "Protected Natural Area for Care and Rehabilitation Center for Marine Mammals" also known as the Chetumal Bay Manatee Sanctuary, a protected natural area of 281 000 hectares covering the Hondo River, the Bay of Chetumal and Guerrero Lagoon.

Since 1996, various government agencies, as well as colleges, private institutions and international conservation organizations have joined forces to help support this sanctuary. Sanctuary is home to one of the largest remaining populations, around 150-200 individuals, of Mexican Caribbean manatee. This area is also home of other endangered species like: the marsh crocodile, river turtles and jaguars.

Manatees are large slow aquatic mammals and weigh between 300 and 500 kg (600 to 1,200 pounds). They are uniquely adapted for eating aquatic plants and can remain submerged for up to 20 minutes.

MAP OF THE CHETUMAL BAY



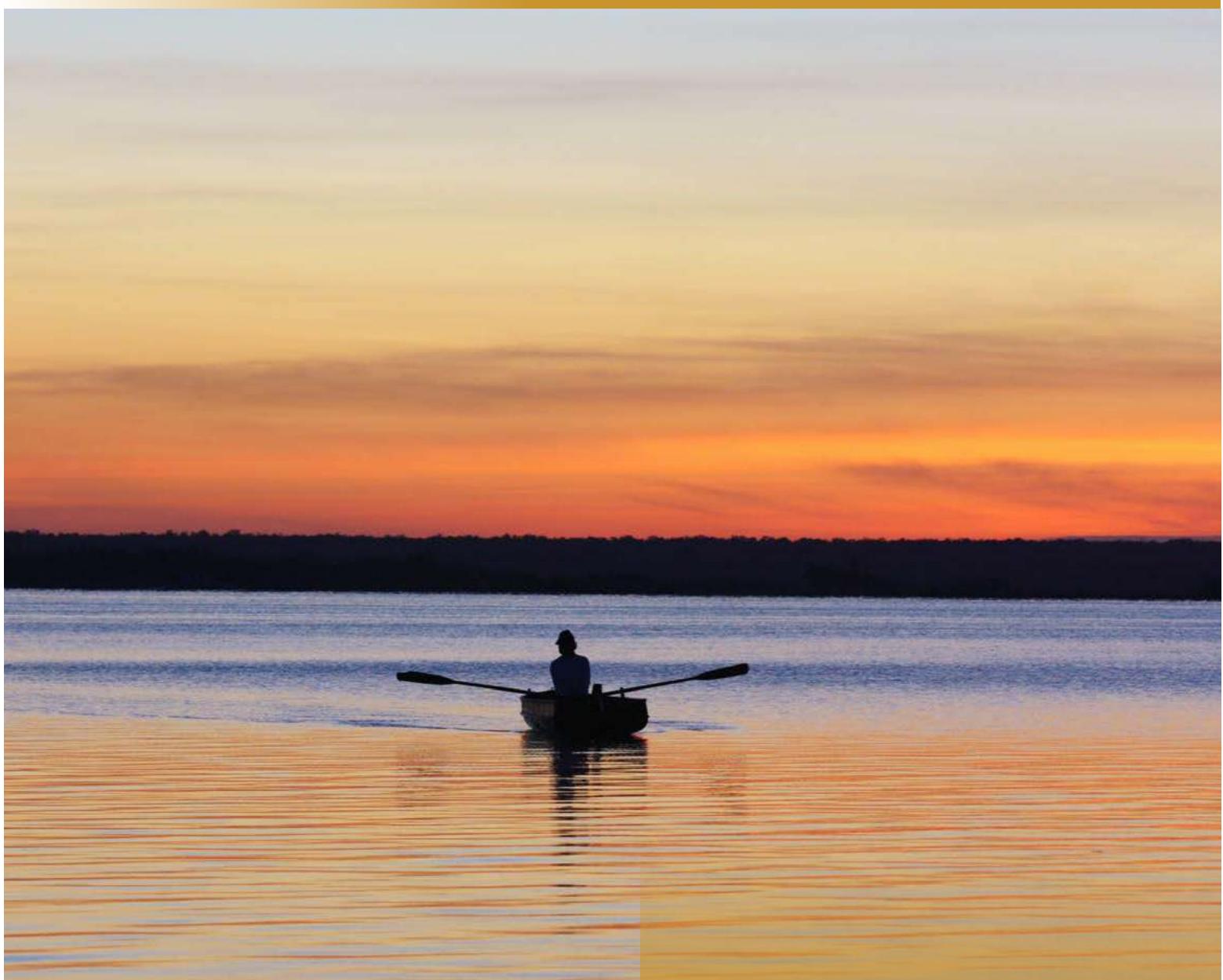
Symbols

- | | |
|-----------|---------------------|
| ⛺ | Camping |
| 🏺 | Handicrafts |
| 潛 | Diving |
| 🏡 | Cabins |
| 🍽️ | Typical food |
| 🏨 | Hotel |
| 🛶 | Kayak |
| .starfish | Marina |
| 🏛️ | Pyramidal mounds |
| 🏛️ | Museum |
| 🏊 | Swimming |
| 🦅 | Bird watching |
| 🐢 | Turtle watching |
| ⛴ | Boat trip |
| 🐟 | Fishing |
| 🧗 | Rappel |
| suceo | Snorkel |
| 🏄 | Stand Up Paddle |
| ZIP | Zipline |
| 🏛️ | Archaeological site |

Distance Table

Bacalar	38.5 km	38 min	
Cancún	383.4 km	4 h 50 min	
Calderitas	8.2 km	16 min	
Dzibanché	81.8 km	1 h 20 min	
Kohunlich	68.0 km	1 h 05 min	
La Unión	113.5 km	2 h 01 min	
Mahahual	142.1 km	1 h 48 min	
Oxtankah	6.2 km	13 min	
Xcalak	198.1 km	2 h 46 min	
Zona Libre	14.2 km	23 min	

RIBERA DEL RÍO HONDO



The Rio Hondo is a corridor in the middle of the forest and the natural border between Mexico and Belize, with an approximate length of 209 km. During the colonial times, more than 250 years ago, the river was used as a waterway to get the precious logwood. Later, it was the route to transport natural chicle gum, which was extracted from the chicozapote sap, mahogany and other precious woods. Today, the river is flanked on each side by extensive groves. Along the way there are beautiful springs, streams and ponds.

TIP

If you love kayaking, venture to navigate the route used by the pirates from Chetumal to Bacalar crossing the Chac Estuary, or explore the Hondo River and paddle many channels that weave through the mangroves.





El Palmar

It is a village where you can find huge crystalline swimming pool fed by a natural spring that is cool and pleasant in a place known as El Manantial (The Spring). There is a restaurant where you can taste dishes made with freshly caught fish. There are charming places along the river road with beautiful scenery. Two kilometers from El Palmar is La Palma, with crystal-clear streams flowing through large green leafy trees. And 17 km down the road you will find El Balneario, located in a tiny community named Álvaro Obregón, in this area the stream characterized by shallow depths forming pools ideal for swimming.

Laguna Milagros (Lagoon of Miracles)

About 23 km west of Chetumal, in the town of Huay-Pix is the beautiful Laguna Milagros with the amazing azure water where you can swim. The lagoon is almost 2 miles long and a little bit more than a mile across at its widest point. It has some cabins, a trailer park and restaurants offering a tempting menu of fresh seafood. You can paddling in a kayak or enjoy a boat tour.

The Laguna Milagros has been the scene of many local and national boat races.

La Unión

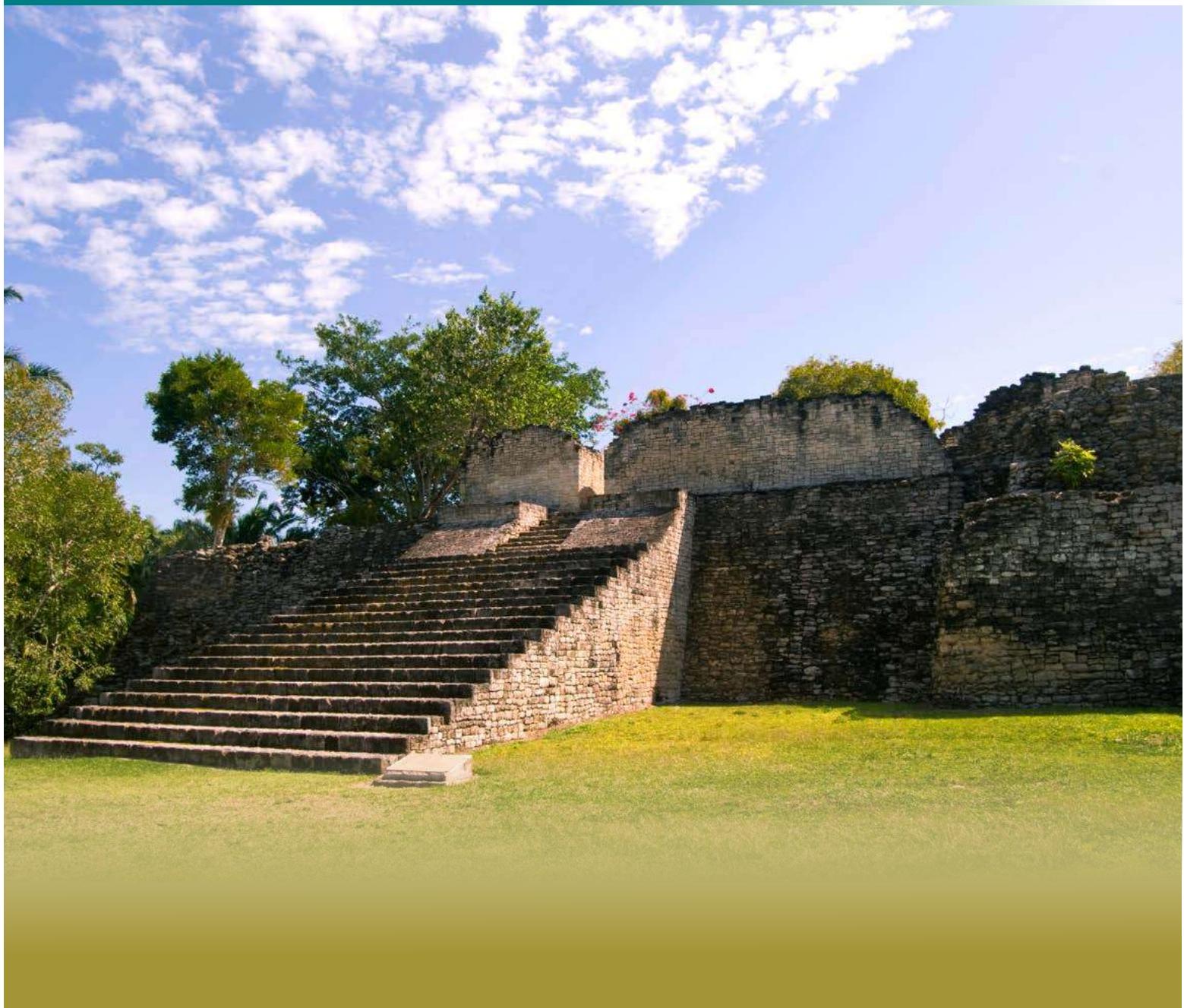
This border town is located on the banks of the Rio Hondo, you have to use a canoe to cross the border to Belize. In this location the main attraction is the "Cenote del Cocodrilo Dorado"(Golden Crocodile Cenote), where visitors can swim in the nearby stream, venture into the jungle with a guide, or explore a cave. The sinkhole looks like a bright cobalt blue mirror with a diameter of about one hundred meters. The cenote is nestled in a range of hills, up to 70 meters-high, and there is a cliff where the adventurous can also go rock climbing, rappel or zip line. When the sun comes down, you can see clouds of bats coming out of the walls.

TIP

Across the Hondo River is a Free Trade Zone, with dozens of tax free shops offering a wide variety of merchandise. To cross the border bridge on foot or by car you don't need a passport. Belize also has a number of casinos. The Casino also features shows, bars and restaurants with a wide selection of cuisines. Next to the Free Zone is the road leading to Orange Walk and Corozal within Belize. Mexican travelers do not require a visa to enter the country, but if you are traveling by car, you required purchasing auto insurance.



MAYAN ARCHEOLOGICAL ZONES



Twelve centuries ago, according to archaeologists, in the south of Quintana Roo lived near one million inhabitants, which mean three times more than current population.

The region was then one of the most important in the Mayan World, and the vestiges of that period confirm that the civilization had large and cosmopolitan cities and had sophisticated ceremonial centers and residential compounds for the ruling groups. Additionally, the Mayan civilization had developed road networks known as Sacbés, and a water supply system. However, what is striking is its majestic art.

This route comprises three archaeological sites very close to each other: Kohunlich, Dzibanche and Kinichna. These sites are an example of the greatness of Mayan Classic Period. You can miss it!



Located just twenty-five minutes south of Chetumal, are the remains of one of the most ancient Mayan cities in the Yucatan peninsula. It arose during the Classic era, between 300 and 600 AD.

Most of the Oxtankah's structures you can see today were constructed between the 4th to the 6th centuries, although many of them were modified between the 11th and 16th centuries.

The ruins are clustered around two plazas: Abejas (The Bees) Plaza and the Columnas (Columns) Plaza. In the first plaza you will find a platform with four structures and the remains of what could have been a sacred labyrinth.

In the second plaza stand the remains of a building that seems to have been a palace. Every important structure was covered with stucco, decorated with Mayan glyphs and painted with many colors in its time of glory. There are traces of a chapel, believed to have been built by the conqueror Alonso de Avila in 1531. There is a small museum on the site with reproductions of pottery found in this place, as well as drawings of buildings and some maps. Hours: Daily 8:00 to 17:00 hrs.





The former name of the site is unknown. The name Kohunlich is not a Mayan Word, comes from the English Cohoon Ridge, meaning "lomerio de corzos" which refers to the existence of Cohune palms, a characteristic species of the area.

It is located just 70 km west of Chetumal and is a fascinating archaeological site both for its history and for its aesthetic value, beside it is surrounded by a unique natural beauty. It was first settled around 200 BC, although the majority of its most significant buildings were constructed during the early Classic period between 250 and 600 AD, however about 200 of them are still covered with thick vegetation and overgrown by trees. In its golden age, it was a trade linking point for cities in the Yucatán peninsula and the rest of the Mayan cities of Central America.

The most significant peculiarity of this site is the presence of an artificial irrigation system for channeling rainwater. There are 8 groups to explore on the site and among the most important are: The Acropolis, the Palace of the Stelae, the Pixa'an Group and 27 Escalones (27 Steps). The view from the top of this last platform is amazing and provides an overview of the green-carpeted horizon.

By the year 1,200 AD, the site was abandoned, due to an unknown causes.

The site also functions as an important wildlife refuge. As it is in the middle of the jungle, you will walk through its paths framed by a huge variety of plants and trees, you can enjoy the flora and fauna of the region. Hours: Daily 8:00 to 17:00 hrs.



Bet you didn't know

The most representative building is the Figurehead Temple under a thatched covering. The pyramid-shaped building is adorned with three-meter-tall masks (8 feet) representing the Maya Sun God, Kinich Ahau, each is slightly different but all are elongated and wear a headdress with a mask on its crest. Five of the original eight masks survive, flanking a central staircase. You can still clamber up the structure to get a close look at these monumental pieces of art, which are in surprisingly good condition with some of the original colors.

DZIBANCHÉ



This massive city is scattered over 42 sq. km (16 sq. miles), with several groupings of buildings and plazas though the site is not completely excavated.

It is one of the largest and most important settlements in southern Quintana Roo. During its heyday, it was argued to be one of the largest and powerful settlements competing with other major cities like Calakmul, in the neighboring state of Campeche.

The site is fairly old dating to 200 BC. is a complex composed by four major architectural groups: Dzibanché, Tutil, Lamay and Kinichná.

The name of Dzibanché is applied to the main group of structures, located a kilometer and a half east of the entrance. Half way you can see Group Lamay to the west, another archaeological zone that has not been opened to the public because it is still under investigation, and at the far end is Kinichná.

The tour of the Dzibanché group starts with the Platform VI, or Temple of the Lintels. This is a perfect spot to orient yourself for the rest of the site. The structure was built in the Teotihuacán style consisting of an inward-sloping surface or panel called the "talud", with a panel or structure perpendicular to the ground sitting upon the slope called the "tablero".

This pyramid is topped by a temple with two vaulted galleries and a lintel where you can see Maya calendrical inscriptions, which gave the site its name, since Dzibanché means "writing on wood".

The path then brings you into Plaza Gann, a huge square platform known as Platform II or Temple of the Cormorant.

A burial was found in one of the three vaulted chambers with a number of offerings including a ceramic vase decorated with a cormorant and a jadeite mask with obsidian and shell inlay; the rear corridor, which is narrower and higher, is reinforced at its ends to prevent the collapse of its walls which supported a hollowed-out trapezoidal cresting. In the plaza there are like a half of dozen of structures, and the most important is the Structure XIII or Temple of the Captives, is of special interest because of the several sculptured risers of its main stairway, representing captured warriors, accompanied by hieroglyphic inscriptions related with military confrontation with Calakmul. Looking across the plaza to the north, we see a similarly plain, stepped platform. It is Platform XVI or the "Temple of the Toucans." It also is thought to have had a wooden temple on top of the platform.

The Xibalbá Plaza is located northeast of the site and it was the focal point in the ancient city. The Plaza is ringed by North Palace, South Palace and the Platform I or Temple of the Owl, a large building with rounded corners in the style of the Mayan pyramids of the Guatemalan Petén and Belize. Atop of this temple there is a chamber, in which were found the remains of a member of the elite and a rich array of funerary objects, including a rare alabaster statue of a monkey and a carved shell depicting an individual with jade and pyrite inlay.

This Mayan site was abandoned around the year 1000.





The archaeologists have named this site "House of the Sun" from a stucco element with the representation of the glyph Kin (sun), which is preserved in the back of the Acropolis. The complex consists of a number of smaller palace-type structural units that were believed to have functioned as residences.

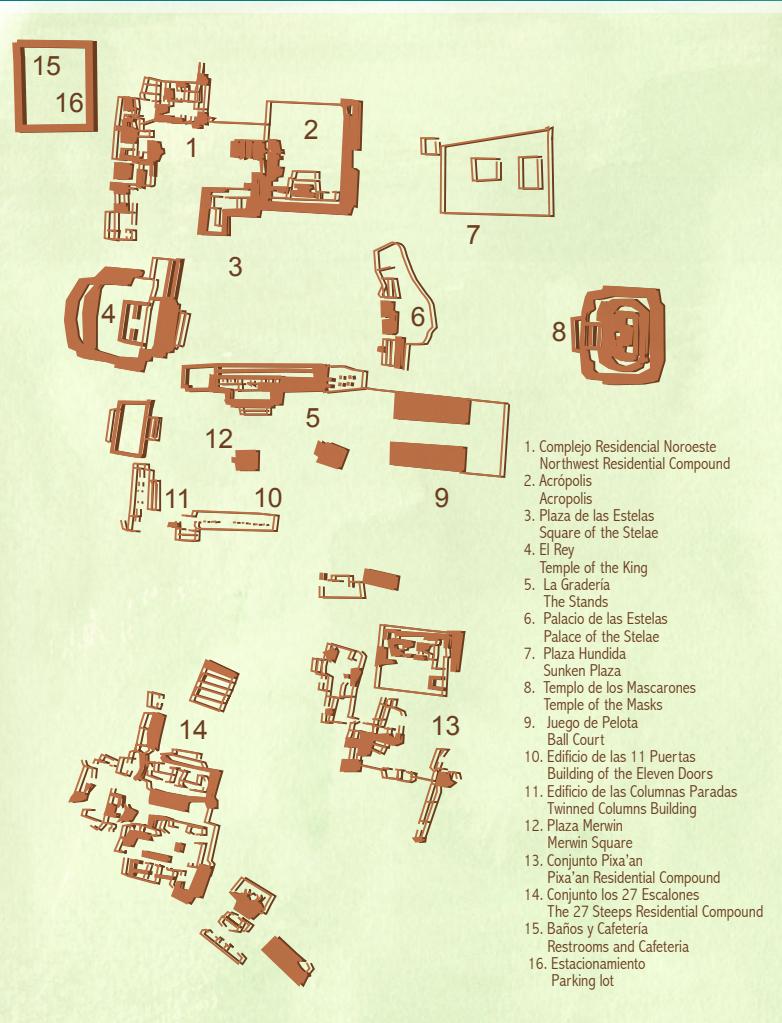
At Kinichná, you can climb the spectacular Acropolis, stretching over three levels, each from a different era of history. It was built somewhere between 200 and 600 AD during the early Classic period. The Acropolis is a

splendidly proportioned structure; it soars above the plain dwarfing the smaller buildings and terrace that surround it. Stairs lead to palaces and temples on different levels. This temple has preserved in the exterior stucco friezes representing sun motifs. Offerings of jade associated with a burial were found in the upper temple.

The site holds a certain mystery and appeal with a wonderful landscape surrounded by ceiba trees. Hours: Daily 8:00 to 17:00 hrs.



Kohunlich



Dzibanché



CHACCHOBÉN



Archaeologists believe Chacchoben was settled about 200 B.C. It is the largest settlement detected so far in the Lake Region of southern Quintana Roo.

The site covers an area of nearly 6 square kilometers. Upon entrance, the first structure, Edifice twenty-four, found in Plaza B, is an impressive tall structure with its multi levels and stairway on each side.

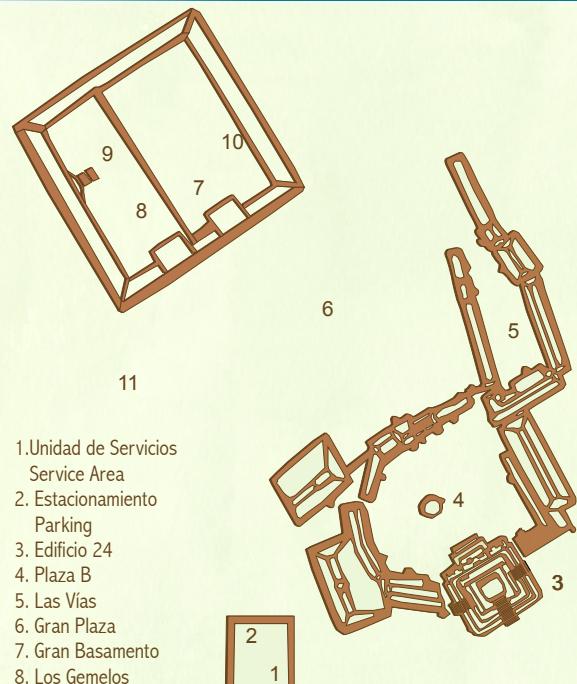
Then is another group, probably a residence for the leading group. Inside it you can see low masonry platforms, which may have supported rooms with perishable materials. One of the most important complexes is El Gran Basamento (The Great Base), containing five buildings. On one of the ascending staircases you will observe Structure I with Mayan calendar dates.

The particular landscape gives Chacchoben a special touch that enhances the magnificence of the different structures. The scenery changes in this region and provides visitors a great lesson in indigenous vegetation. Here you will find monkeys, toucans and songbirds, as well as white cedars, mahogany, fig trees, pepper trees, zapote, ramones, chacas and corozo. Hours:

Daily 8:00 to 17:00 hrs.

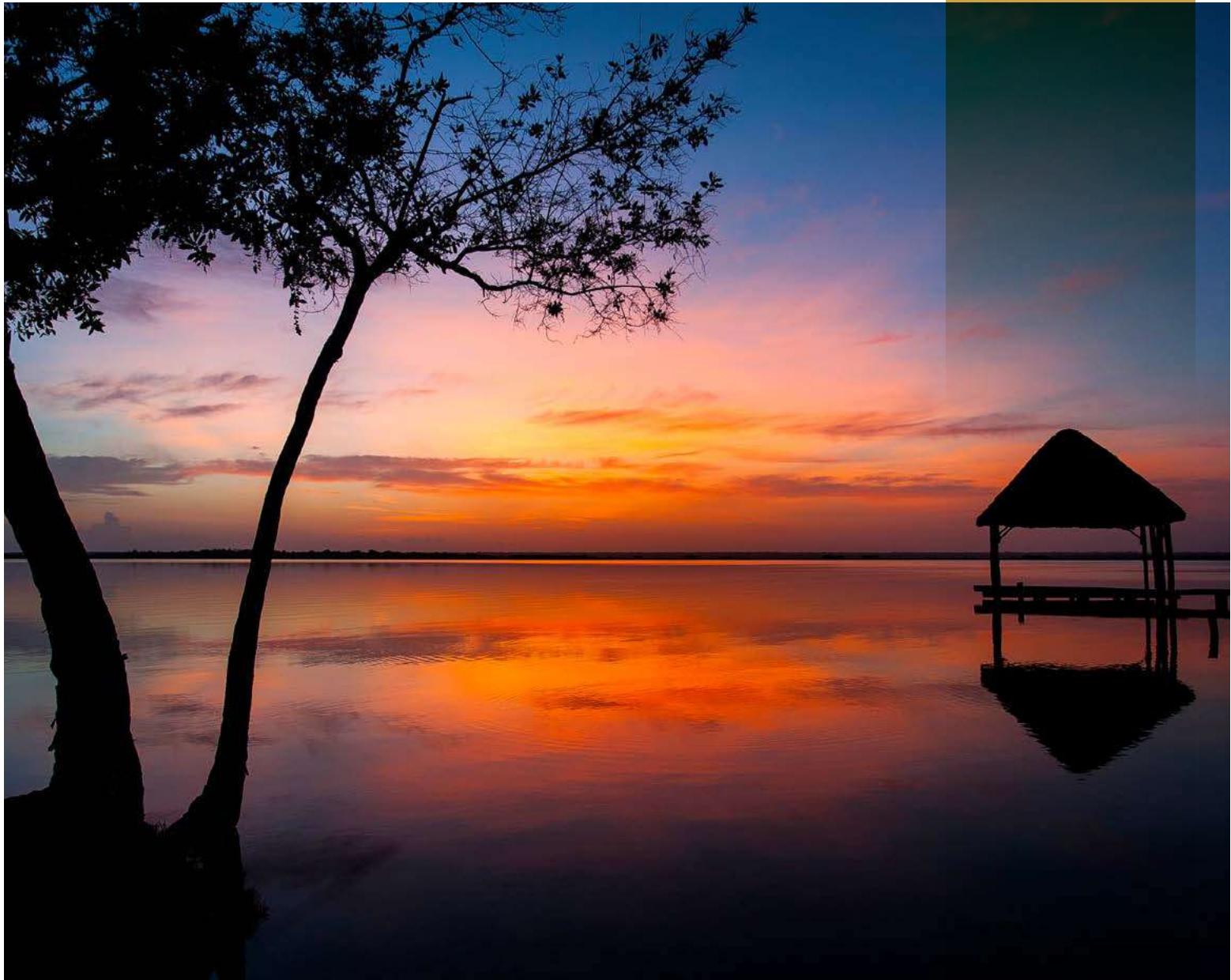


Chacchobén



- 1.Unidad de Servicios
Service Area
- 2.Establecimiento
Parking
- 3.Edificio 24
- 4.Plaza B
- 5.Las Vías
- 6.Gran Plaza
- 7.Gran Basamento
- 8.Los Gemelos
- 9.Las Vasijas
- 10.Templo 1

LAGOON OF SEVEN COLOURS



Bacalar lagoon is almost 60 kilometer long from Kah Uchben in the north to Xul-Ha in the south. It is the second longest lagoon in the country, after the Chapala lagoon, which is about 80 kilometers long. Bacalar is the entrance to an enormous river system in southern Quintana Roo. It is actually three irregular but parallel waterways. Close by is another lake-and-marshlands system, Chile Verde, that drains low-lying marshlands north and east of the lake into Laguna Guerrero and the Bay of Chetumal. The southern end of the lagoon is connected to the Río Hondo through the Chac channel. The ancient prosperous trade routes ran through the intricate water corridor, and today the visitors enjoy the lagoons striking no less than seven different shades of blue.





Bet you didn't know

The peaceful Bacalar of today hides layers upon layers of history. It was founded in 1545 with the name Villa de Salamanca de Bacalar and with the years became the most important settlement on the eastern coast of the Yucatan Peninsula. Of all the valuable woods in the area, even above precious mahogany, it would be the fate of palo de tinte (Dye wood), to become the main target of exploitation for profit by the pirates and by the conquistadors. The natives used the natural dyes from this timber-yielding leguminous plant to color fabrics, in dark colors such as black and dark blue. Nowadays, this natural dye is still used for various handicrafts and to dye some embroidered huipiles.

Until the mid-twentieth century logging camps in the north end of the lagoon used it as a major transportation route for native goods to get to Chetumal. In previous centuries the English pirates penetrated from Belize in search of valuable logwood (also called Palo de Campeche) and after the town was sacked in the 17th century, the Fortress de San Felipe was built to prevent the ravages suffered by the population from the pirates. Considered one of the most beautiful lagoons in Mexico, the water is warm and beautifully crystal clear, morphing from bright turquoise to deep indigo colors as the depths of the lake change. For the visitor, this massive water system offers unique opportunities for leisure and adventures, it is an excellent place to practice water sports, especially in the south where there are several channels and a small inlet called Chaak River. There are small springs ideal for swimming, jet skis or kayaks.

Because the shores are quite weedy you don't really want to walk in and swim from shore, and beside there aren't really any easy access points to do this. Instead, look for one of the many docks along the shore that you can use to get into the water to swim off or rent a boat, jet ski or kayak. Explore the shorelines across the lagoon a landscape filled with bright contrast colors, the lush green vegetation and different shades of blue. In the Uchben Kah Park there are guided tours to learn about the native flora and fauna, better preserved in the northern part of the lagoon.

This lagoon of shallow waters and soft sand, also called "of the seven colors", is the area's main attraction. This lake is part of a lagoon system of approximately 55 kilometers long. Inside the lagoon there are areas with some deep pools full of limestone formations ranging from gentle slopes to small cannons and real walls, this is a unique show for diving enthusiasts; the dives are very safe and ideal for beginners.



BACALAR, A MAGIC TOWN

Bacalar is located 25 Miles north of Chetumal and the charming of the village sneaks up on unsuspecting visitors and engulfs them slowly. By itself, it is a town possessing all the features to be named a Magic Town, a title it received in 2006.

It was founded as a Mayan village named Siyan Ka'an Bakhala in 435 AD. Years later Bacalar became contested ground ever since the Spanish conquistadors wrested it from the Mayas in the 1530's, and Don Gaspar Pacheco refunded the village with the name of "Villa de Salamanca de Bacalar" in 1544. Later years saw the Spaniards fighting off marauding English pirates mining the red gold of the palo de tinte tree for expensive clothing dyes. And still another conflict erupted in the mid 1800s, the Caste War, that took over Bacalar as stronghold. Today, in contrast, Bacalar has a very nice provincial atmosphere with its colonial architecture and history that interweave with the blue turquoise waters of the lagoon, known as the Lagoon of Seven Colors. Every August, the town of Bacalar celebrates the Fair of San Joaquin of Bacalar, an annual event eagerly awaited by the people. For nine consecutive days, different neighborhoods host festive celebrations. Visitors are welcome and should definitely join the fun—expect plenty of food, music, dancing, performances of all sorts, and a three-day hydroplane race, among other things.

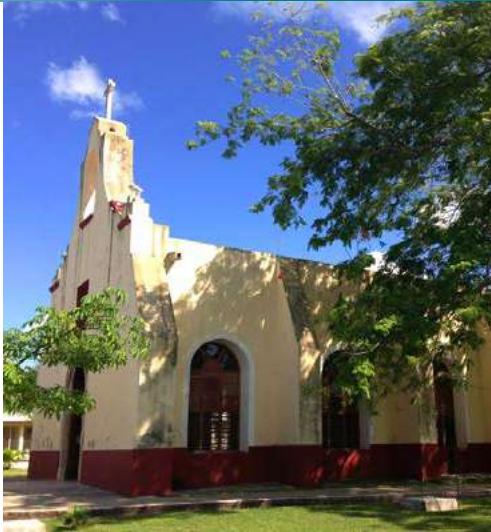


SOMETHING UNIQUE IN BACALAR

While the blue hues are impressive, what's even more unique about the lagoon is its high concentration of stromatolites: rare rock formations that are among the earliest life forms on earth, with over 350 millions years in the planet. According to the scientists, these living stones were the backbone of all life on Earth. Millions of years ago stromatolite reefs covered part of the sea, producing oxygen in a massive way, which caused a drastic change in the Earth's atmosphere.

These natural treasures can be found only in few places like: "Shark Bay" in Australia, Andros Island in Bahamas, the Red Sea, Lagoa Salgada in Brazil, salt pans of Northern Chile, Cuatrociénegas, Reserve in the state of Coahuila, and in the Bacalar Lagoon in the area known as "Los Rápidos" (The Rapids).

Stromatolites are structures formed by huge colonies of cyanobacteria. In Bacalar the microbialite bed is over 10 km (6.2 mi) long with a vertical rise of several meters in some areas. They take long periods of time to develop, a reasonably sized specimen can represent thousands of years of growth, that is why is very important to preserve the ecological environment. Please don't touch, walk upon or stand on these formations.



Plaza Principal (Main Square)

Located in the upper side of the village is the ideal place to take a stroll while admiring its central kiosk and breathing in the fresh atmosphere of its gardens.

Casa de la Cultura

The House of Culture is located in a 19th century building, offers a series of workshops. You can choose from dancing, writing and theater, among others.

Iglesia de San Joaquín

The Parish of San Joaquin is an 18th century colonial-style building with a stunning vaulted ceiling. Inside you can see murals representing the story of the Caste War and outside you can enjoy a nice garden.

According to urban legends, the church is said to be haunted by the ghosts of murdered people during the Caste War. If you are a ghosthunter or if you love mysteries, you should visit the church at night.

Casa Internacional del Escritor

The International Writer's House is a spacious and comfortable facility for national and international writers and artists in general. It has hosted major national and international events such as the First National Meeting of Film Writers, First National Meeting of Directors of Film, and First International Diploma for Writers, among others.

FORT OF SAN FELIPE

Built in 1733 to defend the town against recurrent pirate attacks. It is a formidable military structure with defensive walls, four corner bastions equipped with 11 iron cannons (it used to have 34 originally) and a moat that is 4 meters deep. In 1983 the star-shaped stone edifice has been restored to its former glory, and boasts with beautiful gardens, murals, and a museum. It contains a small but fascinating collection of artifacts, including pre-Hispanic and colonial pieces, drawings, city maps, a beautiful mural and even the skeleton of a real pirate of the Caribbean. Hours: Tuesday to Sunday 9:00 to 20:00 hrs.

The 18th century fort has great views of the lagoon and surroundings, is one of the most Instagrammable spot in Bacalar.



CENOTES IN BACALAR



Cenote Azul (Blue Sinkhole) – Located 2.5 miles from Bacalar's downtown, it is a profound blue abyss, which connects with the Bacalar Lagoon. It is said to be the widest cenote in Mexico, measuring up to 200 meters (656 feet) across (it's elliptical); beside it is 90 meters (300 feet) deep, with crystalline blue water, it means one of the deepest cenotes in the world. The deep blue waters are enhanced by the deep green tone of the mangroves and reed beds surrounding the cenote. The Cenote Azul is a must place for divers who visit the region represents a real challenge because the walls of the cenote dropped straight down to 170 ft. You will find intricate maze of roots and trunks intertwined and overlapping, holes of various sizes and rock formations on the walls. The cenote has many caverns to explore, but you need an experienced guide and proper training. The cenote is also suitable for swimming and canoeing. On the shore there is a restaurant famous for its seafood. Hours: Daily from 9:00 to 19:00 hrs.

Cenote Cocalitos – It can be found approximately 2-3 kilometers out of town and has a diameter of 230 m (755 feet). The fresh water lagoon is feed by four underground cenotes and Cocalitos is one of them.

You can arrive by boat, or pay a small fee to access the beach. It has a lovely area with hammocks and swings by the water to relax. This is one of the few places on earth where you can see living stromatolites, and it is also known as the Stromatolites Sanctuary. Hours: Daily from 8:00 to 18:00 hrs.

Cenote Negro (Black Cenote) – Also known as The Witch's Cenote, it has a submarine fracture in its depths. It is an open sky cenote with a diameter of 130 m. (427 feet). In a matter of feet, the water goes from a peaceful turquoise to an inky black, where a limestone cavern has collapsed into itself to a depth of almost 100 meters. Here you will experience a strong upward force. It is surrounded with lush green vegetation and the turquoise blue waters swiftly drop off into a deep hole of pitch black magic. If you want to dive in this cenote you must be accompanied by an instructor, but it will be an unforgettable experience where you will find unique formations, walls and narrow canyons.

Cenote Esmeralda (Emerald) – It is a small cenote with an average depth of 70 m (230 feet) and you can see how the water gushes to the lagoon. Here you'll be amazed by the different shades of blue.



The Rapids of Bacalar – This is a narrow channel roughly halfway between Bacalar and Xul-Ha Lagoons. In this transparent water river the water runs quite fast from south to north and all along the shore. Kayaks are available for rent or you can simply let the current take you as you swim down with a life jacket. The current is stronger in the middle of the river and there are two cords where you can hang on and resist the water flow, it's not deep and for most of the time, you will be able to stand on your feet. In the rapids you can also admire the stromatolites, coral-like organisms found in only a handful of places around the globe. Like corals, the surface of the structures is fragile so please don't touch or step on them.

Parque Ecoturístico Uchben Kah (Ecotourism Park) - The park covers 90 hectares on the northern shore of Lake Bacalar. It has excellent trails in the jungle for hiking and mountain biking. They offer various activities such as guided walks through the vegetation and interpretive trail to learn more about the local fauna like birds, tapirs and crocodiles.

There is also an exciting night tour, where you can observe the crocodiles on the shore of the lagoon and the light from your headlamp may capture a surprised inhabitant.

You will arrive to discover the history of the town as told in the old hamlets. Walk the road of the town towards the museum of chewing gum and mahogany wood, where you can learn about the history, customs and occupations of the town's natives. The park's facilities have been adapted for a restaurant, store, bathrooms, dressing rooms, showers, snorkeling equipment rental, and ATM.

There are also camping areas and sections of the coast for aquatic recreations.

It is located in Pedro Antonio de los Santos, Highway Chetumal-Felipe Carrillo Puerto Km.77.

DINING IN BACALAR

Its cuisine is a combination of Yucatecan and Belizean cuisine, some of the most representative dishes are: "rice and beans" cooked with coconut oil; tamales de xpelón (sort of bean tamales), the sotobichay, a tamale Chaya (tamales prepared with a leaf called chaya, a plant of the region), the tikinxic, fish marinated in achiote mixture; lobster and pan de cazón, a casserole dish using tortillas with shark meat, black beans and spiced tomato sauce.



MAP OF BACALAR



MAHAUAL



It is a former fishing village where you can indulge in an array of water sports, one of the few untouched pieces of paradise, where water offers an amazing natural playground for fish among an abundant bright coral, you will find from snappers to lobsters. It is an intact heaven for divers. North of the lighthouse is the Costa Maya Pier, designed specifically to receive cruise ships with. Today it has become the second largest cruise port in the country. It offers a lot of amenities like 3 salty water pools that feature swim-up bars, restaurants, a shopping plaza and artisan markets. The beachfront offers a sea wall Malecon, beach clubs and restaurants. Beside, Mahahual beaches are a successful combination of convenience and tranquility, because of the reefs proximity you can enjoy the deep blue or emerald green waters of some of the most beautiful natural pools in the Caribbean. The accommodation is for every pocket, from boutique hotels with incredible sea views to small bed and breakfast, or you can also camp.





XCALAK

It is one of the last pristine beaches in the Caribbean with the unique charm of a relaxed and calm atmosphere for those who love the nature. In Xcalak is located the Zaragoza channel, an artificial waterway between the Caribbean Sea and the Bay of Chetumal, without passing through Belize's territorial seas.

This fishing village offers small hotels and is a beautiful place for biking. An important seabird and wading bird-nesting colony is located a short distance offshore in La Aguada a place with mangrove vegetation. The area doesn't have much beach but makes up for it with world-class fly-fishing, great snorkeling and diving, and a healthy coral reef and lagoon. You can fish sawfish, mackerel, tuna, barracuda, grouper and tarpon all year long, and from April to June you can find dorado, marlin and sailfish.

The Parque Nacional Arrecifes de Xcalak (Xcalak Reef National Park) was established at the end of 2003, affording protection to the coastal ecosystem. The park spans nearly 18,000 hectares (44,479 acres), from the Belize border to well north of town, and includes the reef—and everything else down to 100 meters (328 feet)—as well as the shoreline and numerous inland lagoons. The park is a paradise for diving enthusiasts for its unparalleled biodiversity. The shallow waters keep boat traffic to a minimum, and anglers are good about steering clear of snorkelers. Eight miles south is Rio Huach, which is also part of the ecological park of Xcalak.



BANCO CHINCHORRO

The Chinchorro Biosphere Reserve is 20 minutes from Mahahual by boat. The atoll covers about 500 square miles, it is the largest in Mexico and the second largest in the world. Chinchorro Bank was formed over millennia by the accumulation of fragments of coral skeletons, shells, snails and calcareous material evolved from these creatures.

There is a 60 feet thick coral reef around the atoll completely submerged. The atoll is most taken up by a lagoon of crystal-clear water that is 3 to 25 feet deep and three keys areas: Cayo Norte, Cayo Centro and Cayo Lobos covered with mangrove, palm tree and shrubs.

The flora and fauna of Chinchorro is surprisingly diverse, there are approximately 2,500 types of organisms visible with an infinite variety of shapes and colors. On the windward side of the banks, there are a variety of wrecks from all time periods, so it has become a maritime museum with 68-recorded archaeological sites. Several ships have run aground in the last 500 years, like Spanish and British galleons of the 16th and 17th centuries. Most of the wrecks are very shallow and can best be explored snorkeling, you can admire rudders, anchors and canyons.

On the reefs, divers and snorkelers may see a diverse variety of coral like elkhorn, staghorn, bran, star, and soft corals, as well as hundreds of colorful fish, turtles, even dolphins and sharks living in the protection of the reef. The shallow inside of the atoll is 3 to 5 meters deep. There are fishermen stilt houses in the Cayo Central, the largest and most central of the cays, which are used as temporary camps of tourists coming to take photographs, to film or just swim among these beautiful corals.

We remind you that it is very important to be a responsible tourist and not to touch the reefs or corals.



MESOAMERICAN BARRIER REEF SYSTEM

It is a marine region that stretches over 1,000 km from Isla Contoy at the tip of the Yucatan Peninsula down to Belize, Guatemala and Honduras. The Great Barrier Reef is the largest in the Atlantic Ocean and the second largest in the world, with a length of 600 miles. More than just a barrier reef is an intricate system biodiversity spot with over 500 varieties of fish, 350 species of mollusks, and 65 species of corals.

When visiting a reef area, please be sure not to damage this fragile wonderland. Hire the services certify service providers.



WHAT TO DO IN COSTA MAYA



FISHING

For those in search of a duel with a magnificent marlin, sailfish or dorado, sportsfishing charters can be arranged from Mahahual and Xcalak. During the off-season, spearfishing yields a catch of nassau grouper, black grouper, black jewfish, yellowfin tuna. In Chinchorro, the local fishermen hand harvests the spiny lobster in the reefs.

A new modality is spearfishing, which is somewhat similar to hunting. Costa Maya is one of the best places in the world for this exciting sport. With its clear waters and its rich biodiversity is easy to found snapper, amberjack, yellowfin tuna, striped marlin, sail fish, wahoo, mahi-mahi, rooster fish, striped marlin, grouper, among others.

It is important to mention that in Mexico we are proud to show that we spearfish only while using free diving techniques, as it is illegal here to spearfish while using scuba equipment. In addition, all fish caught are eaten or donated.





KAYAK

TIP

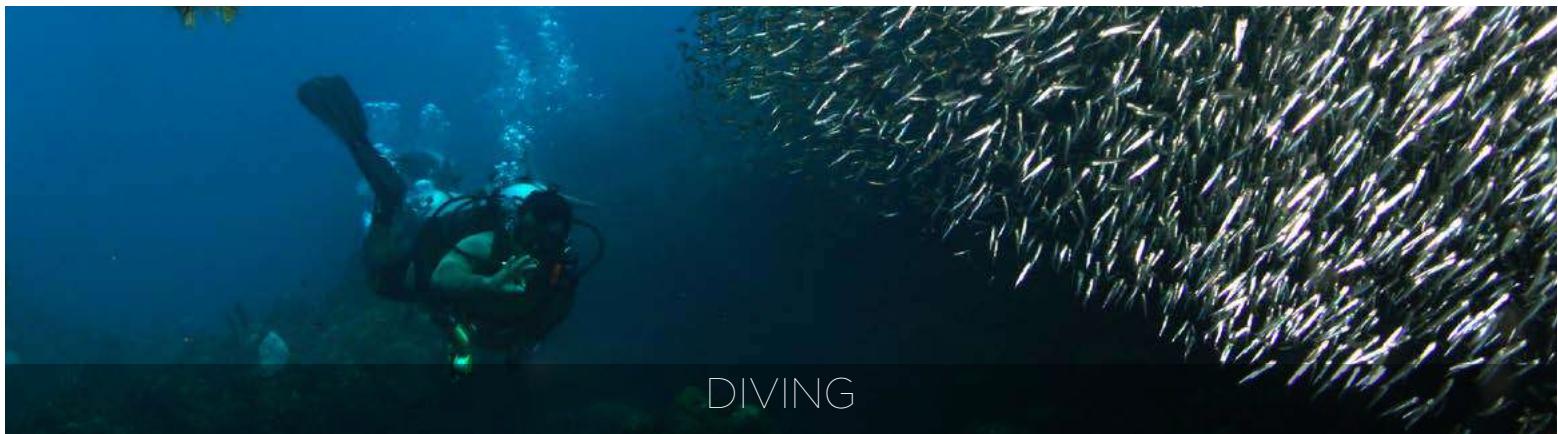
Stand-up paddleboard at sunrise or sunset in Bacalar, you'll visit the sandbars with their many white birds, the Black Cenote, and El Canal de los Piratas (the Pirates' Channel), where you can jump from the remains of a ship into crystal clear waters!

Fans can navigate the Hondo River and the canals twisting between the mangroves at Estero Franco.

The amazing turquoise and calm waters of the Bacalar Lagoon are ideal for kayaking. You can watch the crystal clear waters of the Caribbean in a 2-person transparent kayak; you just have to look down to view the coral formations and the colorful fish.

WATER SPORTS

In the Hondo River at El Palmar there is a good place to swim as well as along the shoreline of the Bacalar Lagoon for its shallow, clear waters. Windsurfing, canoeing, waterskiing, kayaking, and sailing are some of the watersports you can enjoy along the shoreline of Bacalar Lagoon. Stand up Paddle Boarding or SUP, is a fun sport and it is even better in the calm waters of Mahahual or Bacalar.



DIVING

Diving enthusiasts can find a myriad of amazing coral formations and a rich marine life along the reef located just 350 meters from the coast.

Water depth inside the shallow reef is 6-30 feet (meter), with depths on the outer barrier reef ranging from 30 to over 200 feet. There are a lot of sloping walls and second-step walls, allowing divers to choose their own profiles. While the wall goes down below 1,000 feet, some of the best reefs and fish life are in 50 feet of water or less. Visibility varies with weather conditions but is generally between 60 to 100+ feet. Diving the Barrier Reef is year-round, but summer months are better since generally have light winds and provide optimal sea conditions. The water temperatures range from the upper 70s in the winter to as high as 85°F in the summer.

With most sites located just a mere 2-5 minute boat ride, there's plenty you can choose from, at least 20 of the best sites are just less than 30 minute ride. Some of the best spots are:

Exposición: 9-15 m (30-49 ft.), place with a grand variety of marine life, beginners.

Los Escalones: 15-30 m (50-100 ft.), this is a place to dive with groups of turtles and Eagle rays, moderate.

Faro Viejo: 10-23 m (32-75 ft.), soft to mild current with little tunnels and caves you can squeeze through, moderate.

Capitanía: 14-60 m (45-195 ft.), floating along a wall and peeking into the one of many Groove and you can also navigate through a complete vertical chimney, moderate.

Río Bermejo: it has two different spots, Laberinto and Cañada, both averaging about 20 meters (65 ft.), moderate.

Jardines: 7-30 m (23-100 ft.), tunnels and arches with colorful coral and all sorts of different fish, moderate.

Puerto Angel: 12-26 m (72-213 ft.), perfect mix of coral gardens, sandy areas, and fascinating overhangs, one of the favored spots for the Lionfish hunt, moderate.

Punta Herradura: 22-65 m (72-213 ft.), with great visibility

the first things you see are a number of giant barrel sponges, beginners.

Chinchorrito: huge sandbanks spotted with hills of shallow reef, moderate.

Dos Ojos: 15-17 m (49-60 ft.), beautiful passages in the reef with colorful fishes, beginners.

Punta Tan: deep cracks in the reef where you can see nurse sharks and huge stingrays, moderate.

Xcalak offers lots of diving opportunities for divers of all levels. As it is a part of the second largest barrier reef in the world there are deep walls, shallow walls, beautiful canyons and underwater caves locate between spur and groove reefs systems; in the reserve there are lots of different corals but it is specially remarkable the big elkhorn coral formations, big fishes like groupers, measuring upwards of two meters in length, and some catsharks; dolphins will often be seen on the way to dive sites and from time to time you can also spot some manatees. Among the best places to dive in Xcalak are:

La Poza, 11-22 m (35- 75 ft.), a wide passage with high walls with many massive tarpons, moderate.

La Chimenea, 20-27 m (65-88 ft.), a wall drop where you enter a cavern then a swim through up an underwater canyon, advanced.

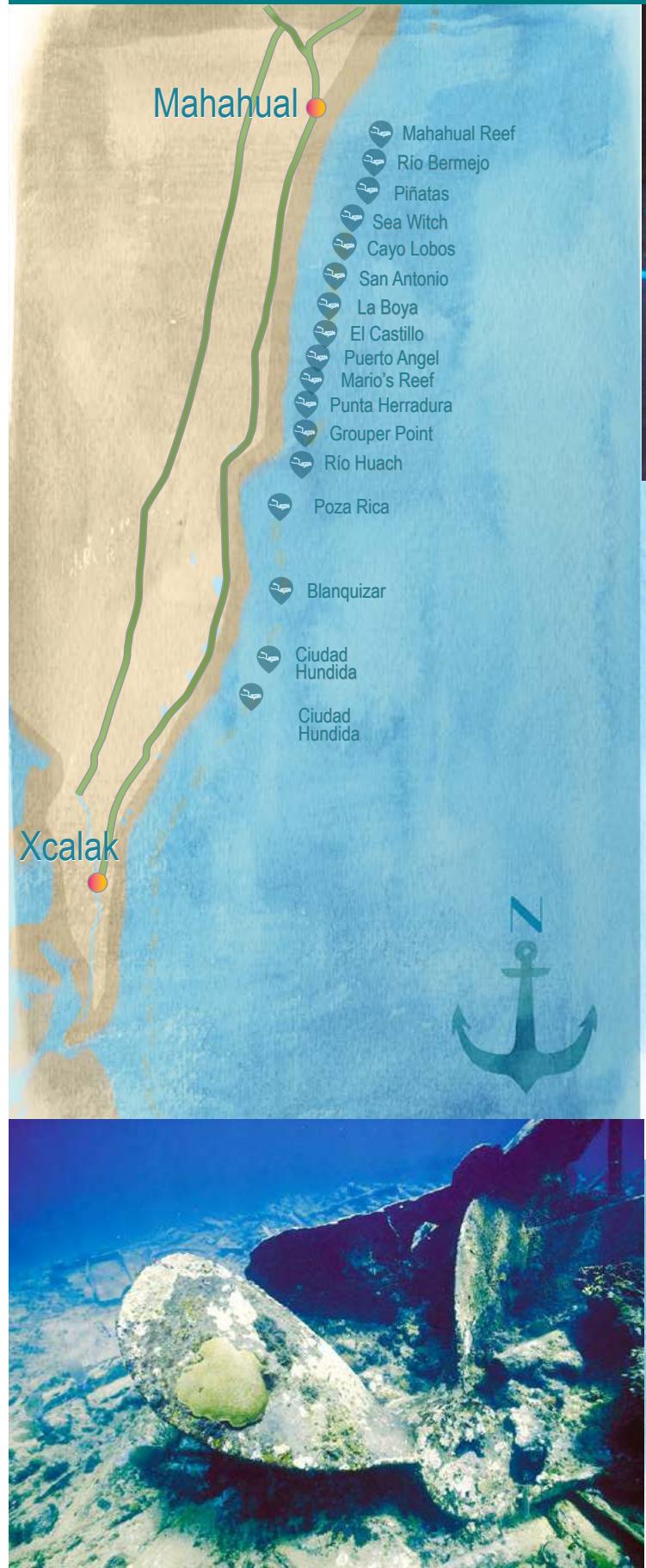
La Pozeta, 10-15 m (32-50 ft.), sand bottoms combine with reef walls where you can find lobsters and morays, beginners.

Around 68 vessels have run aground on the reefs of the Chinchorro coral atoll and expert divers can find their remains. Some of the recommended places are: Coral Negro, full of sea life; Ginger Soul, with a 19th century steamer; Calderas, a 19th century steamer merchant; 40 Cañones, a war ship from the 17th century with amazing canyons among the reef; The Aquarium, abundance of sea fans and elkhorn coral, manatees and catsharks can be seen; and Santa Teresita, a beautiful coral wall.

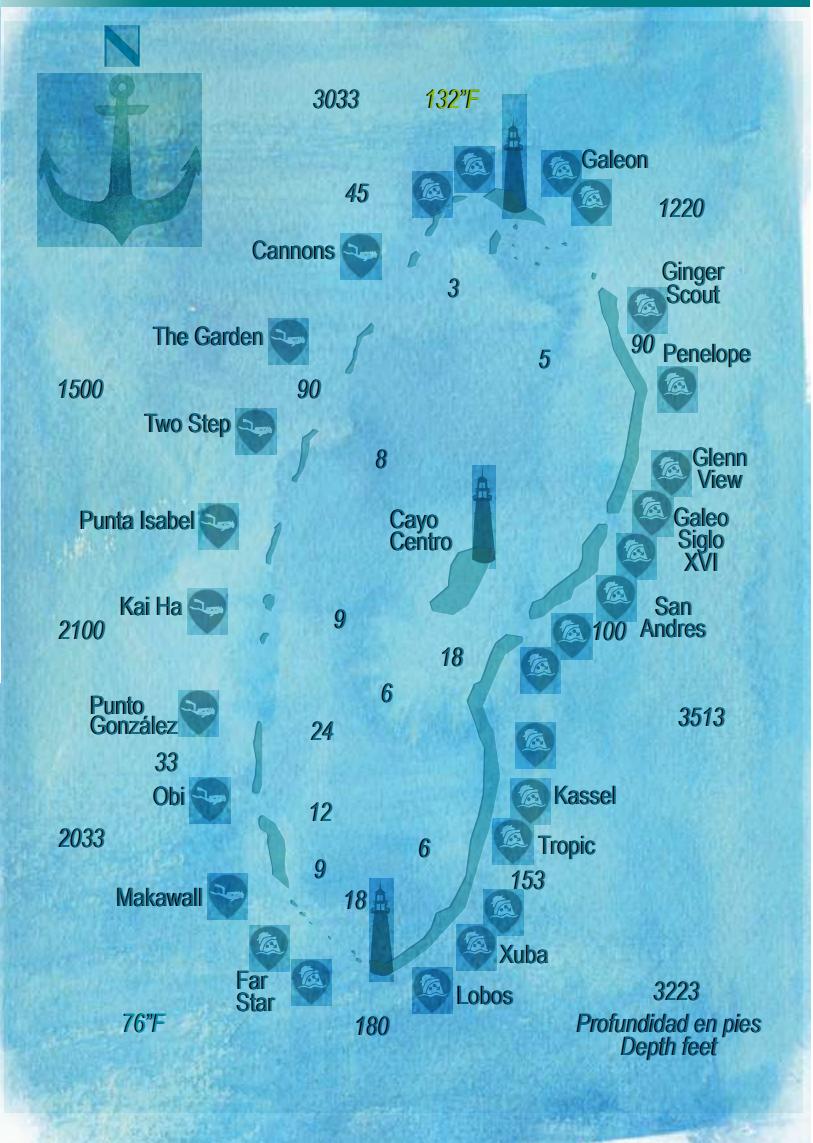
SNORKEL

Mahahual is an excellent snorkeling destination. Just 10-minute boat ride you will endlesss pristine coral formations and big schools of tropical fish. There are also great excursions to be made nearby to Banco Chinchorro National Reserve or Xcalak Reefs National Park.

REEFS IN THE COSTA MAYA



BANCO CHINCHORRO





BIRD WATCHING

Mexico is one of the most biologically diverse countries on earth. It is home to more than 1000 bird species and the Yucatan Peninsula is high on the list of unique places to visit for birders.

There are almost the same number of bird species in the region as those that can be found throughout Europe, there are currently more than 250 registered in Quintana Roo. The already diverse local bird fauna is enriched by the fact that more than 250 species spend winters here or migrate through.

Some of the best places for bird watching are the lagoons along Costa Maya and the areas nearby the archaeological sites offers birdwatchers, as well as Sacxán, located 6 km from Huay Pix. This place will offer birdwatchers some of the most colorful birds of the area; from the bird-watching tower on the top of a hill where can see clearly Belize, the Hondo River, and a series of wetlands. Hawk, pink spatula, yellow warbler, white-eyed vireo and storks, are among the birds you can spot in this area

TURTLE WATCHING

From April to September the shoreline of Mahahual become a nest area for sea turtles.

ATV TOUR

This is the ultimate fun in Costa Maya. The tour will guide you to secluded areas on the Costa Maya coast, small villages, and beautiful places to watch birds and the regional fauna.

ADVENTURE

Go zip-lining at Kan K'in, located just 10 minutes by car from central Bacalar. There are 5 short zip-lines and you can enjoy soaring over the Mayan jungle and overlooks the impressive turquoise waters of the lagoon.

La Unión is located 114 km from Chetumal and near the Belize border. Is the perfect place for adventure lovers with a magnificent cenote called Cocodrilo Dorado (Golden Crocodile); this cenote is at the foot of a small mountain range and has a 70 meters high rock wall, making it the best place in all of Quintana Roo to practice rappel. This area is also an ideal place for hiking - both day and night -, mountain biking and camping.

Tourism Promotion Council of Quintana Roo

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