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Cancun: Gateway to the Mayan Ruins

by Dave Thompson

The [Yucatan Peninsula](#) is rich in Mayan history – these historical ruins dot the landscape across this part of Mexico. Conveniently some of the better restored and more well known ruins are within a few hours or less drive of [Cancun](#). Exotic names such as Tulum, Uxmal, Akumal and Chitzen Itza are all remnants of an architecturally advanced at the time civilization.

When deciding where to park it for a few days in Cancun, consider a stay at the [CasaMagna Marriott Cancun Resort](#) – this 4 Diamond rated resort is conveniently located in the heart of Cancun.

Any introduction to the Mayan world should begin with a visit to the relatively new Maya Museum (opened late 2012) located in Cancun. This museum contains three exhibition halls of more than 4,400 square feet focusing on the history of the Mayan heritage in the region, artifacts and ancient human remains discovered in a number of the cenotes located close to the various ruins.

One such ruin that has produced a plethora of Mayan antiquities including human remains is [Tulum](#), located about an hour and 40 minute drive south of Cancun. This is the largest Mayan Ruin in Mexico that is located directly on the Caribbean coastline. And what a place for a Mayan city – the ruins are above steep rocky cliffs which afford one great views overlooking the ocean. Tulum is fairly compact so it's easy to see and the ruins have been well restored. There are a number of nearby cenotes (holes in the Limestone that were thought of by the Mayans as being portals into Mayan underworld. They were sacred sites and also served a useful purpose; they provided year round fresh water. Several located close to Tulum are best used to beat the heat and humidity. A number are open for swimming including the nearby Gran Cenote or the slightly further and less visited Cenote Escondido.

A visit to Chitzen Itza is a full day trip from Cancun (about 2.5 hours one way). This is one of the Yucatan's prominent and most visited Mayan ruins – much of which has been well restored. During a visit here I spent much of the day wandering among the temples, ball courts and various stone platforms. This is a much larger complex than Tulum. The temples are impressive and incredibly steep lined with rounded rocky steps. While you can no longer climb to the top of these you can walk around them to get a sense of their large size. The manpower and engineering to create these is certainly impressive considering their age.

Coba and Akumal are other prominent ruins within several hours driving or less of Cancun. Unlike at Chitzen Itza you can climb to the top of the grand pyramid in Coba. It is steep with narrow rocky steps (a giant rope is setup in the middle to help with the climb), like other Mayan pyramids but once you are on top you are rewarded with excellent views of the rainforest in all directions.

For more about the Mayan culture on the Yucatan Peninsula visit the official Cancun tourism website and view their section about Mayan Culture and related attractions at www.cancun.travel/en/things-to-do/mayan-culture



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About Dave Thompson

Dave is an international travel writer and founder of Dave's Travel Corner, a premier travel resource since 1996. He has traveled to over 100 countries where he enjoys the outdoors, backpacking, mountain climbing, meeting people, and experiencing other cultures.

A pioneer in the travel blogging field, Dave has extensive contacts and wide influence in the travel and wine industries as well as a large audience of DTC readers and social media followers.



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