



Ik Kil Cenote,  
Yucatán Peninsula

PICTURE Shutterstock/ectsk22



# Mexican fave

Increased airlift to Cancun next year will boost access to the culture, adventure and history hotspots of Mexico's Caribbean coast. **Laura French** reports

**W**hite-sand beaches, cerulean sea, swaying palms and exceptional cuisine – it's not hard to see why visitors flock to Mexico's Caribbean coast. And with Tui launching direct flights from Belfast and Cardiff to Cancun in 2025 – adding to its non-stop routes from Gatwick and Manchester – and British Airways upping its Gatwick to Cancun service from six to seven flights a week next summer, it's becoming easier than ever to access.

But it's not just about flying and flopping here; beyond the lures of the glittering shores, the surrounding Yucatán province is a hotspot for history, culture and adventure, with ancient Maya sites, candy-hued towns, crystal-clear cenotes and picturesque isles among the attractions. We've picked out some of the best spots for clients keen to combine Cancun with wider exploration.

## CANCUN PLUS...HISTORY

Mexico's Yucatán Peninsula is chock-full of historic Maya sites, from Cobá – a sprawling ancient city in the heart of the jungle – to the Tulum ruins, which perch on cliffs overlooking the ocean.

The crowning glory, of course, is the Unesco-listed Chichen Itza, a three-hour drive from Cancun. One of the best-preserved and most impressive sites of the Maya world, this cluster of stone structures dates back to AD600, when it was a thriving metropolis with a population of 50,000. Today, the 30m-high El Castillo

pyramid at its heart offers a glimpse into the geometric genius of this ancient civilisation, harking back to when spectators would sit watching ball games and human sacrifices would be made in honour of the gods.

**Book it:** Day trips are available from Cancun, but for clients keen to combine it with other historic sites, look to Exoticca's 12-day Mexico City, Mayan Marvels & Cancun Bliss tour. Travelling from Mexico City to

“The Yucatán is a hotspot for history, culture and adventure, with ancient Maya sites, candy-hued towns and crystal-clear cenotes

Cancun, they'll visit the ruins of Palenque and Uxmal, alongside San Cristobal de las Casas, Campeche and beyond. Prices start at £2,899, including flights. [exoticca.com](http://exoticca.com)

## CANCUN PLUS...CULTURE

The Yucatán is home to a host of cultural spots – not least in the colourful colonial-era architecture of its cities. Among them is the 'yellow city' of Izamal, nicknamed for its striking, mustard-bright architecture; and Valladolid, which is often a stop on Chichen Itza tours. ➤

# DESTINATIONS

## LATIN AMERICA | MEXICO

### NEW OPENINGS

Ava Resort Cancun



✪ Luxury all-inclusive resort **Ava Resort Cancun** opened this summer, offering a large spa, lagoon-style pools and a water park, plus 17 bars and restaurants. Gold Medal offers seven nights from £3,165, flying from Gatwick on May 6, 2025. [goldmedal.co.uk](http://goldmedal.co.uk)

✪ **SHA Wellness Clinic** opened its Mexican outpost in the Riviera Maya in January, offering tailored wellness programmes against a backdrop of the sparkling Caribbean Sea. Rooms start at \$550 per night. [shawellness.com](http://shawellness.com)

✪ Direct couples to the adult-only **Secrets Tulum Resort & Beach Club**, which opened last year with five pools, 14 bars and restaurants and a spa. Seven nights' all-inclusive starts at £2,249 with Kuoni, including flights from Gatwick in May 2025. [kuoni.co.uk](http://kuoni.co.uk)

✪ **Maroma, A Belmond Hotel**, reopened last year after a revamp and features Maya-inspired accommodation set on a white-sand beach backed by jungle. Inspiring Travel offers a week's B&B from £3,320, including private transfers and Gatwick flights on June 12, 2025. [inspiringtravel.co.uk](http://inspiringtravel.co.uk)

Maroma, A Belmond Hotel



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: Mérida; Chichen Itza; Hotel Xcaret, Playa del Carmen PICTURES: Tui; Shutterstock/eyetravelphotos, Richie Chan

Both sit on the route to Mérida, the capital of the province and a three-hour drive from Cancun. This historic city is an intriguing blend of Maya and European influences, with its pastel-hued mansions, vibrant galleries and opulent museums. Visit Plaza de la Independencia – the leafy central square, framed by an elaborate cathedral – and stop by one of the city's many restaurants to try *cochinita pibil* (slow-roasted pork) served amid elegant courtyard terraces.

**Book it:** G Adventures has a new Mexico Family Journey: Ruins and Cenotes of the Yucatán for 2025, which takes in Mérida and Izamal. The tour departs from Playa del Carmen (a 45-minute drive from Cancun airport) and starts at £2,859, excluding flights. [gadventures.com](http://gadventures.com)

### CANCUN PLUS...ADVENTURE

Nature-loving visitors seeking an underwater adventure will find diving and snorkelling aplenty. The islands of Cozumel and Isla Mujeres (reached by ferry from Cancun) are renowned for their marine life, with turtles, eagle rays and nurse sharks darting between vibrant coral formations. If clients are here between late May and mid-September, they might see the annual whale shark migration on snorkelling trips from Isla Mujeres or the islands of Contoy and Holbox.

The province's myriad cenotes – with their sun-dappled, turquoise waters – offer swimmers the chance to explore an underground landscape of stalactites and stalagmites.

The Sian Ka'an Biosphere Reserve (about 30 minutes from Tulum) is also a hotspot for marine life, offering boat trips to spot dolphins, crocodiles and manatees.

**Book it:** Journey Latin America can tailor-make a trip combining five nights in Cancun, two on the island of Holbox and two on Isla Mujeres from £2,391, including snorkelling with whale sharks, swimming in cenotes, visiting Sian Ka'an Biosphere Reserve and more, with B&B accommodation, transfers and ferry tickets. [journeylatinamerica.com](http://journeylatinamerica.com)

### CANCUN PLUS...FAMILY FUN

The Cancun area is a magnet for families, with theme parks, water parks and child-friendly beaches to explore. Don't miss the rollercoasters, ziplines and waterslides at oceanfront Ventura Park. But the standout is Xcaret, with adventure and culture-focused parks scattered across the region. Direct families to Xcaret Park, where they'll find a theme park, water park and ecology centre home to an array of wildlife. For adrenaline-fuelled fun, Xavage offers white-water rafting, jet boating and 'Monster Truck' buggies, while Xplor boasts cave rafting and the Riviera Maya's highest ziplines.

**Book it:** A week's all-inclusive stay in a Superior Suite at Hotel Xcaret in Playa del Carmen, where guests get complimentary access to all the parks, as well as transport, costs £10,335 for a family of four. The price includes flights from Glasgow on February 27, 2025. [tui.co.uk](http://tui.co.uk) **TW**