

My oh Maya

Cancun and the Riviera Maya offer luxury all-inclusive at excellent value, finds Joey Tyson on an AMResorts mega-fam

The colours of Cancun's beaches are the first thing that strike you, with mile after mile of powder-white sand lapped by brilliant turquoise waters.

It's the same story along the coast. From Playa Mujeres to Tulum, the beaches of the Quintana Roo region are so idyllic, they almost look as if they've been Photoshopped. One thing's for sure, you won't need a filter here.

For an all-inclusive beach holiday, clients can't really ask for much more. Add in a high level of service, excellent value for money and an exciting range of excursions – from climbing Mayan pyramids and swimming in underground caves, to scuba diving along reefs and snorkelling with turtles – and you've got the complete all-inclusive package.

To find out how to sell this region, *Travel Weekly* joined an AMResorts mega-fam to Cancun and the Riviera Maya.

▶ VALUE FOR MONEY

Besides the beaches, the big selling point for Cancun's Hotel Zone – the city's main resort area – is how much you get for the price you pay. Agents on the trip were impressed by the five-star service, top-shelf drinks and high-quality finish of the rooms and felt they compared very favourably to the Indian Ocean or higher-priced Caribbean islands.

Ashling O'Hara, senior travel consultant for Hayes & Jarvis Ireland, says: "I was extremely impressed with all the resorts we visited – amazing facilities and amazing value for what you get. It is premium, high-end

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all-inclusive, so it could work out cheaper to come here for a super high-end holiday that you just don't get in Europe.”

What's more, the weather is near perfect during the peak December-to-April period: expect temperatures in the high 20s, a welcome breeze, low humidity and few rain showers, making it an ideal time for couples looking to avoid school holidays.

▶ EXCITING EXCURSIONS

But it's not all about lying on the beach, sipping margaritas. Quintana Roo's history, geology and biodiversity make for some memorable day trips and excursions.

The area is strewn with relics and ruins from Mexico's ancient past, plus an extensive network of cenotes, or underground swimming holes. To sample both, clients can take the trip to Coba, one of the last Mayan pyramids tourists are still able to climb (day trips from £110, with lunch). A steep 138-foot hike will have the thighs burning, but it's worth it for the sweeping panorama over the surrounding jungle canopy. The full-day excursion involves a stop at a Mayan settlement for ziplining, canoeing and a 30-foot abseil into a cavernous cenote. ➔

TOP TIP

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LEFT:
The fam
trip group

RIGHT:
Tulum



PICTURES: SHUTTERSTOCK; CARLOS BOLANOS

➔ The 13th-century settlement at Tulum is another Mayan site worth visiting. Perched like cliff-top sentinels before a turquoise backdrop, the ruins cut a dramatic silhouette, and with an idyllic white-sand beach set among the ruins, there are two good reasons to make this trip.

Tulum tours run from most AMResorts properties, including the northern resorts in Playa Mujeres, such as Dreams Playa Mujeres Golf & Spa Resort and Breathless Riviera Cancun Resort & Spa.

Clients staying closer to the ruins, in Dreams Tulum Resort & Spa or Secrets Akumal Riviera Maya, for example, can also reach the ruins via local buses, although a guided tour will allow guests to



Perched like cliff-top sentinels before a turquoise backdrop, the ruins of Tulum cut a dramatic silhouette

get the most out of the site.

There are plenty more mini-adventures even closer to home. Secrets Akumal offers free snorkelling equipment, offering guests the chance to swim with turtles, while coral reefs close to shore mean there are also plenty of colourful fish and stingrays to spy.

ALL BASES COVERED

The range of all-inclusive options ensures all types of holiday are covered. Famous for spring break, when US students descend en masse to Mexico, Cancun's nightlife is legendary. The Coco Bongo Club, part nightclub, part over-the-top acrobatic display, is one of the Hotel Zone's craziest venues. If your clients like their nights out loud and sweaty, this is the one for them.

For families, there are plenty of options away from the mayhem. Neil Darby, senior sales consultant at Travelbag, says: "For families, suggest Dreams Playa Mujeres, purely on the basis that it's the best for kids. You've got the games room,

the climbing wall, the choice of restaurants, the water park. If you're part of a group, parents can go to Secrets Playa Mujeres Golf & Spa Resort, which is interlinked."

Couples and groups seeking a little peace and quiet are also well catered for on the Mayan Riviera. Bethan Gane, destination specialist at Flight Centre, says: "Secrets Akumal and Secrets Maroma Beach Riviera Cancun definitely appeal to the European market, perhaps more so than some of the other properties, which are a bit more party-

orientated and appeal more to the American market."

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SECRETS THE VINE CANCUN

A towering beachfront property popular with Instagrammers and the upmarket party set, Secrets The Vine Cancun is for clients looking for a hotel with some X factor.

Close to the Hotel Zone's main drag, there's plenty of nightlife and high-end shopping nearby, though with 24-hour inclusive room service and a sweeping white-sand beach, clients might not want to stray too far.

The Preferred Club, which offers access to a private pool and lounge

and a free pass for the hydrotherapy spa, offers some respite for those who'd rather recharge than rave.

The six restaurants include a chic Mediterranean bistro.

Book it: A week in a Deluxe Ocean View Double starts at £1,855. All prices are per person with Funway Holidays, including Virgin Atlantic flights from Heathrow departing March 7, based on two adults sharing. funway4agents.co.uk
secretsresorts.com



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BREATHLESS RIVIERA CANCUN RESORT & SPA



AMResorts' fun-themed Breathless brand is all about pool parties and beach discos. It's ideal for solo travellers and groups after late nights and lie-ins, and with 10 restaurants and 10 bars, there's plenty going on after dark.

That said, if the party gets too much, clients can upgrade to 'xhale' status, and make use of a quiet pool, a calm oasis away from the pumping dance music of the 'xcelerate' zone.

Rooms are large and slick, with a huge walk-in shower, minibar

replenished daily and inclusive 24-hour room service, as part of the Unlimited Luxury service. This also includes limitless à la carte dining options, top-shelf drinks and free Wi-Fi. There's also a spa and gym.

The xhale club includes entry to an exclusive lounge, on-balcony whirlpool and personalised check-in and check-out services. **Book it:** A week in an Allure Junior Suite Ocean View Double from £1,735. breathlessresorts.com

✓ Tried & Tested

DREAMS PLAYA MUJERES GOLF & SPA RESORT

Families looking for the ultimate all-inclusive experience will be at home at Dreams, which is designed to keep both kids and adults happy. For the young ones, there's a kids' club, small onsite water park and easy access to the beach, plus plenty of entertainment and live music.

One of its major selling points for parents is its proximity to adult-only property Secrets Playa Mujeres, which offers free entry for over-18s, so parents can leave the children at the kids' club for a couple of hours and collect them later, using a clever beeper system to stay in touch.

There are 10 dining venues onsite, from



quick-and-easy salad bars and ice cream parlours by the pool to reservation-only teppanyaki restaurants, plus 24-hour room service and a minibar that's restocked daily. Upgrade to the Preferred Club and guests will also get 20% off spa treatments.

Sister property Dreams Tulum has a more Mexican vibe, and is less than 20 minutes from the Tulum ruins and beaches which make for an excellent family day trip.

Book it: A week in a Junior Suite Partial Ocean View starts at £1,795. dreamsresorts.com