



# Things to Do in Playa del Carmen

Ah Playa...what a great little beach city. In so many ways, it's the perfect fun-in-the-sun vacation destination. On a gorgeous stretch of Caribbean coastline, Playa is smack dab in the middle of the paradisaic Mayan Riviera.

The city itself offers many attractions, plus you don't have to go far to enjoy the raw beauty of the surrounding area.

Playa del Carmen has its own charming character that's youthful, free-spirited and yet ambitious. This once sleepy little fishing village has developed rapidly. It's definitely more grown up than Tulum, but far more bohemian and quaint than Cancun. Just walk 5th Ave [affectionately known as *La Quinta*], and you'll see this beach city's fun personality all around you!

## 5th Avenue Shopping & Sightseeing

This pedestrian thoroughfare stretches over 25 blocks running parallel with the beach. It's like an outdoor mall or market but with a tropical carnival flavor! This is truly the heart of Playa. Chances are, you'll stroll this little avenue a few times during your vacation. It's too fun to resist!

Lining both sides of 5th there are hundreds of stores, restaurants and bars. If you came to shop, you'll have your hands full! In one block,

you'll see high-end stores sandwiched between local merchant shops. Colorful souvenirs are stacked high, silver jewelry sparkles in the sunshine and leather purses, hammocks and panchos swing in the breeze.

You don't even have to buy anything or stop anywhere for a bite...it's an experience just to walk *La Quinta* and see all there is to be seen! Visit the extremely cool outdoor art gallery that sets up along the ave every Thursday night, called *CaminArte*. Watch artists at work and buy a unique memento of your trip!

**TIP:** Merchants and staff can sometimes be aggressive. Just stay cool and say "*No Gracias*" if you're not interested and they'll turn to bothering someone else! If you do want to browse a bit, be friendly and try out your Spanish (they'll appreciate it even if it's meager)! These guys don't make much money and competition is stiff. Your good manners are appreciated and bartering is expected.

### USEFUL SPANISH PHRASES:

Como te llamas?	[Como tay YAM-mass]	What's your name?
Me llamo .....	[May YAM-moh]	My name is .....
Mucho gusto.	[MOO-choh GOOSE-toh]	Nice to meet you.
Cuanto es?	[KWAN-toh ess]	How much is it?
Que precio tiene?	[Kay PRAY-seeoh TEA-ennay]	What's the price?
Hay un descuento?	[I oon dess-KWEN-toh]	Is there a discount?
Gracias por todo.	[GRASS-ee-ass pour TOH-doh]	Thanks for everything.

Necesito una bolsa.	[Ness-ess-EAT-toh oona BOWL-sah]	I need a bag.
Aceptas tarjetas de credito?	[Ass-SAYp-tass tar-HEY-tass day CRAY-dee-toh]	Do you accept credit cards?
Aceptas dolares Americanos?	[Ass-SAYp-tass DOH-lar-ess Amer-ee-CAN-nos]	Do you accept American dollars?

## Beach It Up

Like most of us, you came to visit the beach, right? Relaxing, playing, eating and drinking on the beach...that's pretty much what Playa is all about. Around here, they know how to do it right!

One of the best things about Playa del Carmen is that you can stroll the beach for hours and find your perfect slice of paradise. Even if you're staying in a beachfront hotel, don't stay stuck in one area of the beach! It's all public access and there are a lot of beautiful spots.

Lots of guests [especially the ones who've been here before] love to pack up a little cooler of drinks, a Mexican blanket, perhaps a book or frisbee, and hit the sand. Some expat residents here tote everything down to the beach on their bicycle, even beach chairs and umbrellas at times!

You can hit a beach club for the day and get pampered, if this is something your hotel doesn't offer. Who doesn't dream of being brought an chilled tropical cocktail while lounging on a sun bed as the waves lap the shore a few feet away? Playa has a great variety of beach clubs, each with their own charm.

**TIP:** There isn't a lot of good snorkeling to be had in Playa, unfortunately. Construction and development have obliterated most of the mangroves, and this has affected the health of the coral reefs. If snorkeling is something your heart is set on, it's best to visit a dive shop and go on a tour. Or visit nearby Akumal or Puerto Morelos.

You can swim virtually anywhere along Playa's coastline. The currents are gentle, although you'll notice they do gradually pull you northwards. [Lifeguards and colored flags will let you know the status of the water and how safe it is that day.] This is great news for families with small children. Unlike Cancun or even other destinations on the other side of Mexico, Playa's shoreline has shallow, clear water and minimal waves.

There are two wheelchair accessible beaches in Playa del Carmen, with free amenities for disabled persons. The most convenient one is located right off the main square, nestled beside the ferry dock in downtown Playa. The other is at the north end of town at Playa Esmerelda [a gorgeous non-touristy beach in the local district].

## **Party All Night**

A few of Playa's beach clubs transform into nightclubs. Some have fire-dance shows, live bands and other nightly entertainment. And for the all-night, party-til-you-drop crew, the clubs on calle 12 are where to be. Be prepared to be amazed at COCO BONGO, with a phenomenal floor show and dance party that lasts until the wee hours of the morning.

Several times during the year there are DJ and dance festivals, held at different locations in and around PDC. Partyers can dance all day and all night, if they can handle it!

About 30km south of Playa, at the CATALONIA TULUM RESORT, a new theater has caused quite a stir. The no-inhibitions production entitled RAUXA is a burlesque-style show that performs several times a week.

## **Water Sports and More**

Have you tried fly-boarding yet? It's one of the latest sensations rippling across the beach scene and Playa has taken it up in a big way. Strapped to a type of wakeboard with powerful water propulsion jets, you'll have the feeling of flying, and you can tumble and spin in and out of the water. Or you can try the same concept but on a bike; it's even easier to use.

There are also several places along the beach where you can rent jet-skis and rip around. There are also kayaks and little catamarans to take your crew out on the water. Paddle-boarding is fantastic here most of the year, since the sea is usually fairly calm. It's fun to get out on the crystal-clear water, plus this is a decent work-out for your core!

Not exactly a water sport but amazingly scenic because it happens over the ocean--can you guess what it is? Skydiving! Every day skydivers get the thrill of a lifetime and land on Playacar beach, south of the ferry dock. Imagine jumping out of a plane at 12,000 feet over the stunningly blue Caribbean Sea!

Right in Playacar there is a beautiful 18-hole golf course that's worth playing! There are also several other excellent golf courses in the area [Mayakoba, Puerto Aventuras, etc.] And, of course, there's always beach volleyball--have some fun while you work on that tan! Nets are set up for public use at Senor Frog's [by the ferry dock] and near Mamita's Beach. Several resorts have their own nets as well.

# Day Trips

Get outta town and explore! You're in the Mayan Riviera and there's so much to see beyond the beach. If you're growing restless with lounging by the pool, we've got some options for you!

From Playa you can easily book excursions for a variety of activities. What is your family in the mood for? There's horseback riding on the beach, ATV tours through the jungle, deep-sea fishing...the list goes on. To do everything in the area, you'd have to stay for a lot longer than the typical 2-week vacation most visitors get!

**AKUMAL** - this small town has several protected beaches with turtle-nesting grounds. Pretty much year-round you can swim and snorkel with various species of sea turtles in Akumal Bay. The government is currently trying to regulate the amount of visitors to the bay, in order to protect the delicate ecosystem of the area.

**YAL-KU LAGOON** - there's even more snorkeling to be had at this protected cove in Akumal. Great for kids, the lagoon is mostly shallow and there are lots of fish to see! There's an entrance fee to get in here.

**CENOTES** - these natural freshwater wells in the limestone shelf are all over the Yucatan Peninsula. With crystal-clear water swimming holes, submerged caverns and awesome stalagmite and stalactite formations, they're a unique wonder you have to see! Some of the best cenotes are about 20 minutes' drive south of Playa on the federal highway. [We recommend Cristalino, Eden/Ponderosa, Cenote Azul, Dos Ojos and Aktun Chen. For a full day exploring a gorgeous set of cenotes, visit the Grand Cenote in Tulum.]

COZUMEL - visit the island across the channel for a fun day of shopping, surfing or SCUBA diving. Cozumel is an internationally-known diver's mecca and cruise ship destination. Explore the 'wild side' of the island [the eastern coast], which is mostly undeveloped. Ferries between Playa and Coz run basically 18 hours a day, every day of the week.

XELHA - this eco-park is absolutely fantastic for snorkeling. Family-friendly and beautiful, XelHa is a very fun day. Chill at the hammock island and float through the mangroves on inner tubes. This is the furthest park from Playa del Carmen; about a 45-minute drive south.

XPLOR - this is probably the most active park you can try; with zip-lining, canoeing and swimming in underground rivers, and driving amphibious vehicles through caves. There is also a 'Night Fire' package available after dark for a whole different experience. It's located just outside Playa.

XCARET - the most well-established of the eco-parks listed here, Xcaret opened its doors in 1991. It showcases the gorgeous natural beauty of the area, and has amphitheatre performances, a replica of a Mayan city with costumed performers, plus horseback riding, cave swimming, and lots of exotic animals. It's south of Playa.

XENSES - this is the newest eco-park and is located next to Xplor, just a few minutes' south of Playa del Carmen. It too focuses on the natural beauty of the region's caverns, waterfalls, pools and jungle. Take a sensory journey through the park, solving riddles and optical illusions as you go.

XOXIMILCO - located close to the Cancun International Airport, Xoximilco is fashioned after an actual Mexico City canal neighborhood. Long boats called *trajineras* (like a gondola) take your party of 20

around the canals on a culinary and musical adventure through Mexico's rich historical culture. This park is only open in the evenings.

**RUINS** - excavated Mayan ruins are all over the region! You will even see some in the community of Playacar, and along the highway. Some of the best are Tulum, Coba and Chichen Itza. You can easily visit the beautiful coastal ruins of Tulum in a day [it's about an hour south of Playa]. Coba and Chichen Itza are inland and are even more impressive, although they lack the ocean backdrop of Tulum! Other smaller ruin sites include Xelha, Ek Balam and Muyil. Unexcavated ruins can be visited near Boca Paila/Punta Allen.

**SIAN KA'AN BIORESERVE** - for unspoiled beaches with protected reefs and jungle, visit this beautiful area south of Tulum. There are scores of species of exotic birds to be seen here.[You may want to stay overnight in Punta Allen, Boca Paila or Tulum to fully enjoy this. Sian Ka'an is not far from Playa, but the roads are terrible and travel can take a while!]

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