



## Cenotes--Jewels in the Jungle

If you are an explorer and adventurer at heart, you can't miss out on enjoying at least one cenote experience. You may be asking, "What is a cenote?" That is a very good question, and the answer is one of Mexico's best-kept secrets!

The Yucatan peninsula was at one time entirely under water. Now, below the limestone shelf, underground rivers flow throughout the region. Cenotes are sinkholes through the limestone, leading to flooded caves and beautifully blue freshwater pools. They are absolutely magical, stirring the imagination. You can almost picture the ancient Maya hustling through the jungle, taking advantage of the crystal clear fresh water and the fish that thrive there. Nowadays, locals and visitors alike love the fact the water is cool--sometimes even bordering on cold--providing refreshing relief from the hot, humid summers.

**TIP:** There are four types of cenotes and all of them have a unique beauty.

*Jug or pit cenotes* are open to the sky, like a big swimming hole. These are very fun for swimming and snorkeling.

*Cylinder cenotes* have strictly vertical walls, with dramatic shafts of sunlight beaming in and sometimes with vines and tree roots extending down.

*Basin cenotes* have shallow water basins and usually the most stunning crystalline, aqua-colored water.

*Cave cenotes* are enclosed, often with impressive stalactites and underwater stalagmites and pillars.

Cenotes provide a lot of fun options to spend your time while you're visiting the Yucatan! The jungle settings provide lush, natural environments to just soak, relax and enjoy the exotic bird calls. Or perhaps you want to do some cave or cavern diving [requires certification]. Some cenotes have diving platforms or zip-lines as well. So, depending on your level of sense of adventure, the options are there for you and your family to choose from.

## **Ruta de Cenotes**

One of the best areas for experiencing cenotes in the Riviera Maya is a strip in Puerto Morelos, where cenotes dot the jungle on either side of the road for several kilometers.

If you are staying at a resort or hotel, they can make travel arrangements for you. But if you have rented a car or have other transportation arrangements, the Ruta de Cenote is very easy to find. From either Cancun or Playa del Carmen, take Federal Highway 307 to Puerto Morelos. [It's about a 30 minute drive from either city.] On the west side of the highway you will see big yellow arches with Ruta de Cenote in large letters--that's your exit.

Most resorts and hotels provide tour packages for this area where you can choose from one or several cenotes to visit in a day. Here are a list of just a few that you might be interested in adding to your vacation plans. All are located at different points on the Cenote Route near Puerto Morelos.

### **CENOTES LAS MOJARRAS**

### **Located at km 12.5**

One of the larger open cenotes, Las Mojarras provides two zip-lines and a platform jumping tower with two different heights to test your courage. There are on-site public restrooms, hammocks, a picnic area and camping for those so inclined.

**NOTE:** The water here is refreshing and deep, but not crystal clear like many of the other cenotes mentioned in this article.

### **CENOTE SIETE BOCAS**

#### **Located at km 17**

Cenote Siete Bocas gets its name from the fact that it has seven different entrances [literal translation: Seven Mouths]. A little different from Las Mojarras, these cenotes are mostly underground with only a few open pools.

Take the stairs or a ladder down through the rock formations until you find yourself in a scene from Jurassic Park! With foliage draping the steep walls of rock and a pool below with only a slim shaft of light that filters down from the sun above, it's an experience you won't want to miss.

### **SELVATICA**

#### **Located at km 18**

Selvatica is an eco-park; probably the largest of the eco-parks scattered along the Ruta de Cenotes. Situated in the jungle on the site of a cenote, you can combine your water experience with other activities, such as their 12 circuit zip-line adventure, bungee swing or ATVs.

The park offers different packages that can be purchased and reserved in advance. If you are wanting to do the whole experience, they recommend that you allow at least 5 hours. Check with your resort or hotel about their specific travel details. Lunch packages are also available if you want to make a day of it. This park makes for a very fun, active day and is consistently highly-rated on TripAdvisor.

### **CENOTE CHILAM BALAM**

**Located at km 18.8**

Another unique cenote experience can be found here at Chilam Balam. As you can imagine, every cenote has a different style of rock formation. This particular cenote looks like a dome with the very top collapsed. Picture yourself lying on your back, floating in the cool fresh water and looking up at your window to the sky.

This cenote definitely provides a different feeling from any other cenote along the Route, with a few other surprises. Chilam Balam also offers ATV tours through the surrounding jungle landscape.

### **CENOTE KIN HA**

**Located at km 20**

Kin Ha is incredible! Perhaps one of the largest cenotes in the area, it provides a little sample of all of them. The underground area is massive and provides plenty of space for exploring and adventure, but the open air pools still give you the steep rock walls and beautiful foliage. Kin Ha also provides ATV tours for those interested in a faster pace of activities.

### **CENOTE ZAPOTE**

**Located at km 20**

Part of the Kin Ha cenote group, Zapote provides a little something for the less adventurous at heart. There are steps to access the water. And just for the fun of it, you may want to take the zip-line that runs just 6 feet above the water surface; giving you the opportunity to flip, twist and turn as you splash into a water landing.

## **HELPFUL TIPS WHEN VISITING CENOTES**

Cenotes provide an exciting, beautiful glimpse into the areas away from the beach. So bring along your sense of adventure, and keep in mind these tips to make the experience more enjoyable.

### **Mobility**

Please be aware that the cenotes are not always easy to access on foot. Some walking will be required, which will vary greatly depending on the cenote you choose.

Also, once you arrive at the water's edge you will see that there are almost always stairs [sometimes less than stable] or ladders that you will have to take to actually get into the water. So, if you have mobility limitations or have small children, you may want to check to see exactly what the accessibility is for each cenote. Ask your hotel concierge or tour guide.

### **Things to Pack**

Keep in mind that mosquitos love the jungle, so be sure and bring some spray. Many cenote parks allow you to bring your own packed lunch with beverages. But alcohol is not generally allowed. Be sure to bring your waterproof camera and enjoy the experience

of a lifetime. A change of clothes and a towel are a great idea to keep you comfortable as well.

### **Spa Fish**

On a positive note, there are usually small doctor fish present that provide a nice exfoliating experience to your feet. Most people find it fun and a bit ticklish! But note that some are not as fond of our little friends and would prefer to forego that experience.

### **Signage**

There aren't any billboards in the jungle! So along the Route stretch of highway where you will find the cenotes, make a note of the kilometer markings to more easily find your desired cenote.

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