

TravelLife

FALL 2025



BARBADOS
Morocco
MYRTLE BEACH
PANAMA
Tucson

PLUS
MAD FOR *Mexico*



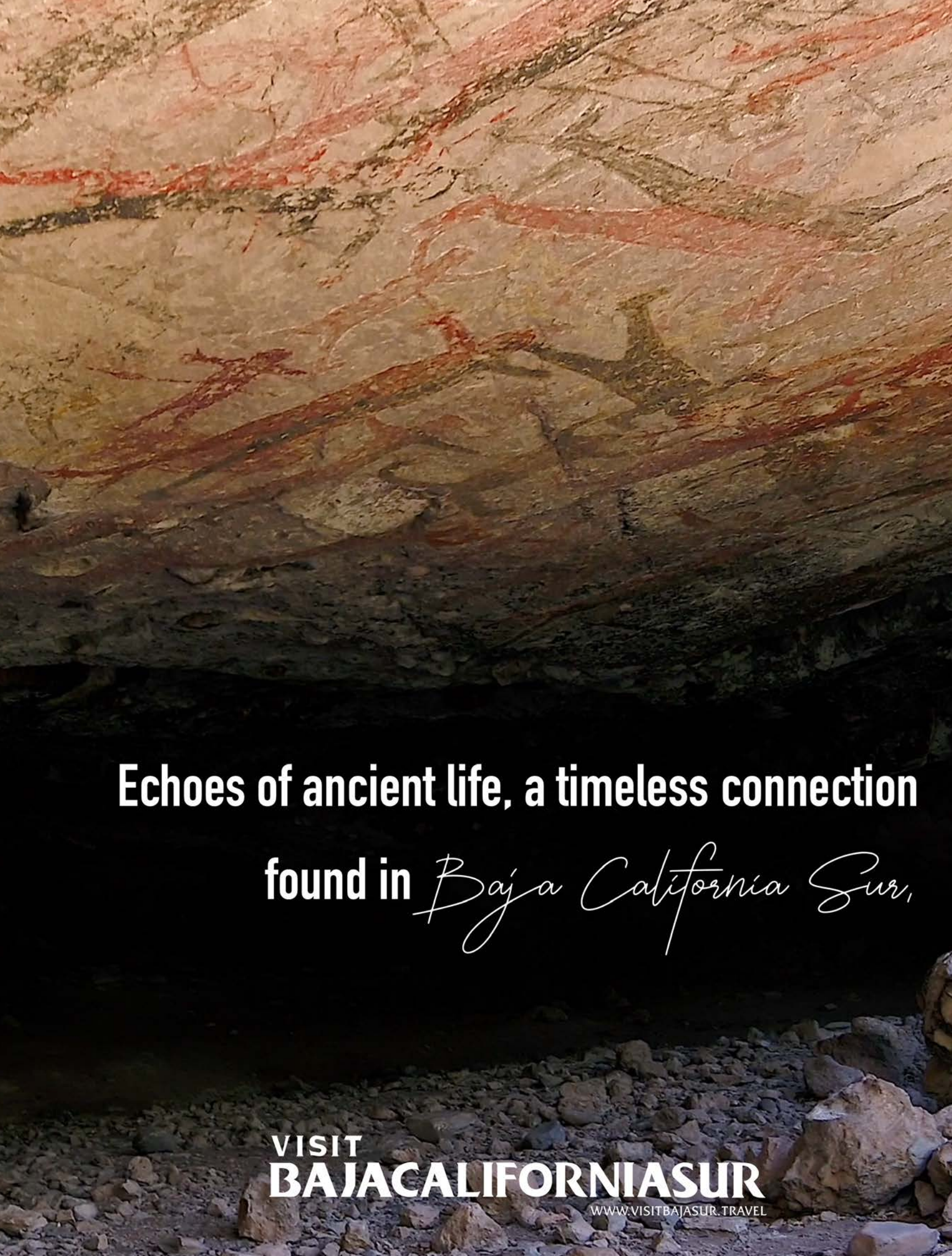
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DISCOVERING THE MANY SIDES OF MYRTLE BEACH, PAGE 16

Kayla Williams is a former TV journalist turned storyteller, host and content creator with a passion for connecting people through authentic experiences. After years in media, she now brings that same curiosity and on-air energy to

exploring the world. For Kayla, travel is more than a getaway—it's a chance to discover culture, community and stories worth sharing.



STEPHANIE HENRY

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DISCOVERING THE MANY SIDES OF MYRTLE BEACH, PAGE 16

Stephanie Henry is a Canadian television personality, content creator and founder of She Auto Know, an automotive lifestyle platform dedicated to empowering women. With over a decade in media, including hosting Breakfast Television and serving as an automotive expert on Cityline,

Stephanie now blends her passion for cars and storytelling with her love of travel. She believes travel is the ultimate classroom—offering culture, connection and confidence—and inspires her community to explore the world with curiosity and style.



WAHEEDA HARRIS

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TWICE AS NICE IN PANAMA, PAGE 12

Waheeda Harris is a freelance journalist who covers travel for a wide range of publications. For her, every part of a trip, from boarding a plane to sitting around a table and sharing cuisine with new friends, is what makes travel memorable. Being able to learn, experience and share in

the joy of discovering our big beautiful planet is an addiction she hopes she never has to give up. She is grateful to share stories with readers, hoping they get the same opportunity to explore.

TravelLife



Photo: Mazatlán's Historic District is alive with colour, culture and old-world charm.

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THE NEW ERA IS THE
TIME TO RECONNECT



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Travel is Always in Season



Freedom isn't bound by seasons, it's found in travel. As autumn settles in, I find myself reluctant to say goodbye to summer's easy rhythm—the long evenings, spontaneous adventures and that unmistakable sense of freedom. But the beauty of travel is that it allows us to hold onto those feelings even as the seasons shift.

In this issue, we explore moments that keep the spirit of summer alive: a vineyard at harvest, a seaside town still kissed by the sun

and adventures that spark joy long after the calendar page has turned. Travel reminds us that summer isn't just a season—it's a state of mind. And at no point did this sentiment feel more fully realized than during a three-day girls' road trip through Windsor Essex. Not only did we manage to combine adventure, beautiful wineries and too many laughs to count; the road trip itself was the ultimate homage to what summer means to me and an experience that will help ensure summer's warmth stays with me well into fall and winter.

In addition to my story on the many ways Windsor Essex makes for an excellent road trip destination (from the amazing food to natural beauty), this issue is packed with great articles we hope will help inspire your next trip. Keeping it local, one contributor experiences a deeply restorative getaway in Prince Edward County, discovering that it's almost impossible not to find your very own slice of calm and serenity in this scenic part of southern Ontario.

South of the border, two writers have a great time discovering the many sides of Myrtle Beach, concluding that the beach itself is well worth visiting for, but don't sleep on the food, fun and southern charm on offer. Another writer gets to know the fascinating desert city of Tucson through its many unforgettable flavours.

Further afield, we have a story on one writer's colourful and unforgettable journey into Casablanca, Essaouira and Marrakech, while another writer has the chance to check out the filming locations of *Jurassic World Rebirth* in Thailand (with a side of luxury at coastal and jungle properties in Phuket and Krabi). We also have a piece on five resorts reimagining evening entertainment by offering unique experiences when the sun goes down (think twilight snorkelling and guided stargazing).

The fall issue also features our annual **Mad for Mexico** section highlighting the many reasons this multifaceted country remains a huge draw for so many. This includes a chef-written story on the unique flavours of Ixtapa and Zihuatanejo, tips on how to make the most of a layover in vibrant Mexico City and a guide to the many sides of Yucatán State.

So as the leaves turn and routines return, I invite you to keep chasing those moments of warmth, wonder and freedom. After all, summer doesn't end—it simply travels with us. No matter where you've been or where you're headed, here's to the lasting memories travel gifts us with.

Tammy Cecco
EDITOR IN CHIEF

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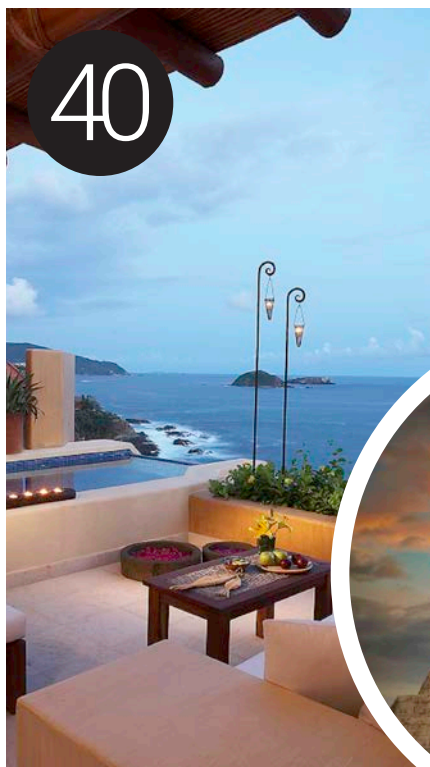


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On our Radar

Nighttime Glow Up Facial in a Box

Here at *Travel Life* we know the importance of taking care of your skin pre and post-travel, but there isn't always time for a salon facial either before or after a trip. Enter the newly launched Nighttime Glow Up Facial in a Box by master facialist Gianna Ugolini. Each box includes everything you need to get your skin glowing, plus a QR code to join Gianna in a guided, step-by-step facial. The spa-level at-home facial is the perfect beauty-boosting travel essential for a visibly refreshed, luminous complexion no matter where you are or where you're heading. Ugolini has 30 years of international experience under her belt and she has taken the classic European facial and incorporated modern day equipment into the mix to create a personalized, soothing experience for every client.

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Twice as Nice in Panama

Hotel La Compania: Two Panamanian boutique hotels created by a Canadian

BY WAHEEDA HARRIS



A SETTLEMENT FOR OVER 500 YEARS, PANAMA CITY IS NOW KNOWN FOR EYE-CATCHING MODERN ARCHITECTURE SUCH AS THE COLOURFUL BIOMUSEO DESIGNED BY FRANK GEHRY AND THE STRIKING F&F TOWER BY PINZON LOZANO. IT'S THIS 21ST CENTURY SPIRIT AND THE HISTORY OF PANAMA WHICH INSPIRED CANADIAN ENTREPRENEUR CHRIS LENZ TO ADD HOTELIER TO HIS RESUME WITH HOTEL LA COMPANIA CASCO ANTIGUO AND HOTEL LA COMPANIA DEL VALLE.

HOTEL LA COMPANIA CASCO ANTIGUO: A visual guide to Panamanian history

Located less than a five minute walk from the 17th century Catedral Basilica Santa Maria la Antigua de Panama, Hotel La Compania Casco Antiguo is located on the site where La Compania de Jesus (Company of Jesus) settled in the now historic district after the destruction of the original Panama City in 1671. In 1997 this district became a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

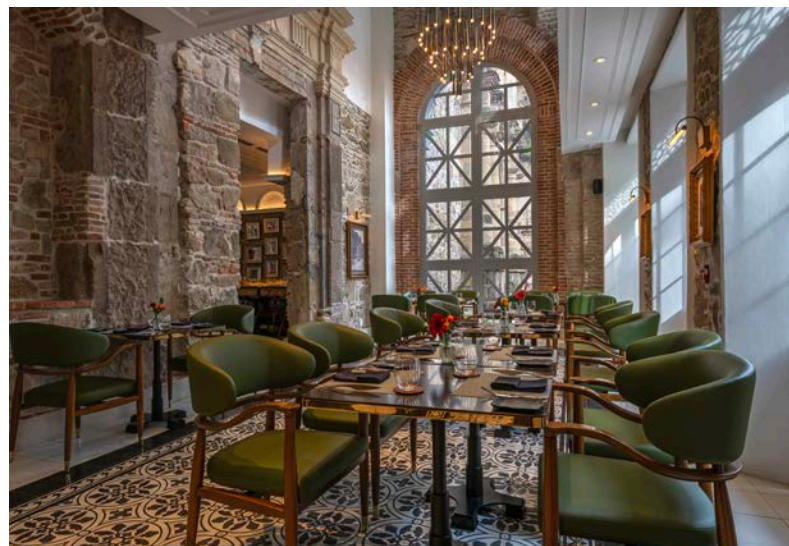
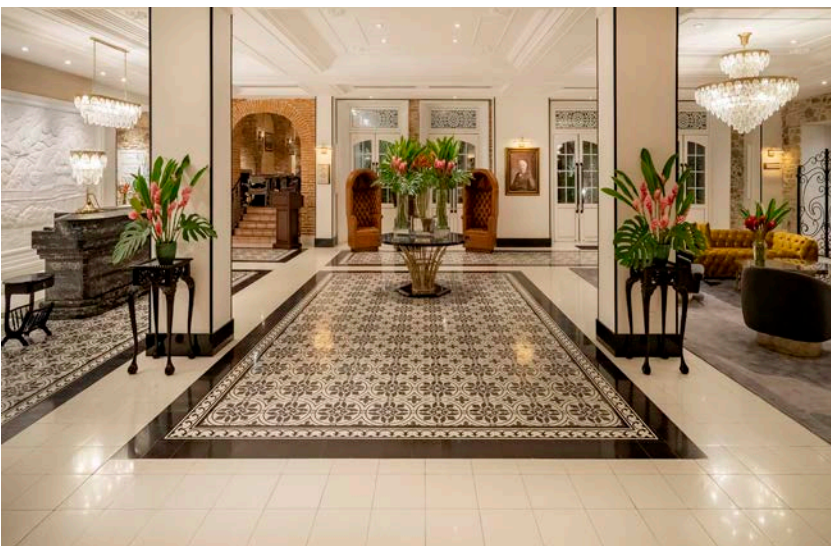
Lenz has reintroduced this building to the neighbourhood, which opened in 2022. The exterior has been carefully restored, while the

interior reveals stories of Panama throughout this 88-room boutique property, with archival Panamanian images displayed beside contemporary love seats. There are three distinct architectural styles within the hotel rooms and suites: 17th century Spanish Baroque, 18th century French and 20th century Beaux Arts American; each style reflecting how these countries have influenced Panama aesthetically throughout history. This creates a distinct blend of furniture and decor in the hallways and rooms paired with modern amenities, spacious wardrobes and marble bathrooms.

Keep your eyes peeled for the 2,000 historic

photographs, vintage sewing machines, suitcases and cameras. In the American wing, the guest elevator interior is a must-take photo. It's been constructed to look like a time machine, a whimsical interactive art piece created by Clandestino Labs.

Head to the rooftop for a mesmerizing view of the historic-meets-modern skyline of Panama City, whether soaking up the sunshine at the infinity pool or toasting to the end of a great day with sunset cocktails at Capella Rooftop before dinner at French-inspired 1739 or Italian cuisine at Luigi's.



“

Whether you stay at one or both of these unique hotels, each one offers more than enough to enhance a visit to Panama.

”



HOTEL LA COMPANIA DEL VALLE: **A wellness oasis in the forest**

Surrounded by verdant mountains and an extinct volcano, Hotel La Compania del Valle was made for getting away from it all. Opened in spring 2025 and inspired by a Tuscan retreat, this serene property is located two hours from the hustle and bustle of Panama City.

Lenz transformed an existing hotel into a 70-room boutique mountain-inspired accommodation where guests have ample opportunity to disconnect and discover the beauty of their surroundings.

Lenz has also curated a Sculpture Park on property inspired by the five elements (wood, fire, metal, earth and water), with a collection of 200 modern art pieces. Additional contemporary and historic art is displayed in the lobby, corridors and restaurants.

Rooms and suites are decorated in a soothing palette of white, cream and oak and feature exposed stone walls, herringbone wood flooring, oversized wardrobes and bathrooms with soaker tubs and rain showers. Sizeable balconies and numerous outdoor and indoor seating areas ensure you have plenty of options to work or lounge throughout the hotel. The spacious rooftop bar has an unbeatable view of the mountains, especially at sunset.

The three restaurants include views of the flourishing gardens and are all worth a visit. Tiempo offers an international menu for breakfast, lunch or dinner; Terra focuses on Mediterranean inspired dishes including vegetarian options; and Fuego is where to go for meat or seafood grilled over an open flame for midday or evening meals.

The hotel's No Excuses Activity Centre welcomes guests try a game of padel and play pickleball

or tennis, or staff can arrange tours with a local operator to explore El Valle de Anton by hiking mountain trails or touring the town via e-bike or horse. Two swimming pools can be found in the hotel's stone and Spanish tile courtyard: a family pool heated by the sun and an adults-only heated pool with water jets for hydrotherapy.

This fall, the highly anticipated 18,000 square foot Elysium Spa will open featuring underground Roman baths, a hydrotherapy circuit and a saltwater pool. The wellness space will also provide facial and body treatments including several based on chocolate or wine.

Whether you stay at one or both of these unique hotels, each one offers more than enough to enhance a visit to Panama.

Aerial View - Rendering

A Fresh Spin on the All-Inclusive Vacation is Coming Soon to *Punta Cana*

Adults-only and thoughtfully designed, Hyatt Vivid Punta Cana introduces a modern escape where guests set their own pace

► A New Kind of All-Inclusive

Set between the Caribbean Sea and Bávaro Lagoon in Cabeza de Toro, Hyatt Vivid Punta Cana is preparing to welcome guests with a fresh take on the all-inclusive escape. The new adults-only, 467-room property will be the third Vivid-branded resort in the Caribbean. Blending clean, modern design with a laid-back atmosphere, the property combines sophistication with a relaxed vibe.

This is an all-inclusive experience where flexibility is the focus ensuring that no matter what you're in the mood for—a week of beach time and spa treatments or a more active vacation, your schedule (or lack thereof) can be shaped by whatever feels right in the moment.



Lobby - Rendering

► Dining, Drinks & More

The food and drink scene is designed to be as varied as it is flexible. Nine dining venues will range from casual snacks to globally inspired meals, while seven bars ensure cocktails are always close at hand. Rather than a set routine, the focus is on choice, letting each day (and meal) unfold naturally. Some restaurants to look forward to include Akari

for traditional and modern Asian dishes, Roots & Thyme for Caribbean specialties with a gourmet twist and Olivo for Mediterranean-Italian cuisine. For drinks, your options range from a swim-up bar and a lobby bar to a speakeasy bar mixing craft cocktails.

► Spaces to Recharge

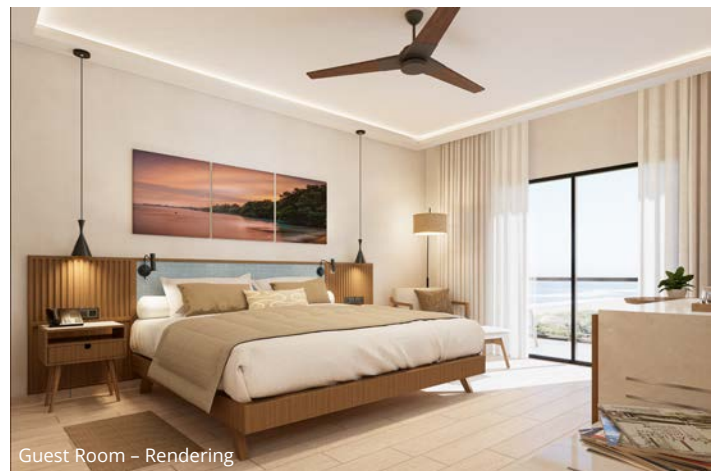
Large, airy guest rooms look out onto the pool, the sea or the property's manicured grounds and draw inspiration from the surrounding landscape. Warm, earthy tones, handcrafted textures and a calming, natural palette create a sense of stylish comfort. If you're looking for an elevated experience, opting for the Vantage Club gives you access to dedicated VIP areas including a private lounge, exclusive pool, beachfront restaurant and personalized service. The effect is a more intimate atmosphere while maintaining the brand's relaxed, social vibe.

► Wellness With Options

Wellness here isn't one-size-fits-all which makes sense because wellness can mean different things for different people. A full roster of classes will cover everything from yoga, meditation and stretching, to aqua spinning, Zumba, CrossFit, boxing, tabata and more. The spa's soothing hydrotherapy circuit offers a quieter way to unwind. Between activities, the Wellness Corner at the spa serves up fresh juices and healthy snacks for a light recharge.

► Activities for Everyone

When it comes to entertainment it's safe to say boredom will never be an issue. The lineup of activities ranges from low-key to lively. Guests will



Guest Room - Rendering

be able to join cocktail lessons, Spanish lessons, arts and crafts workshops or wine tastings, while evenings might bring live music, beach bonfires, movie nights or fashion shows spotlighting local designers. Other options include games like cornhole and pickleball and more active pursuits like pool volleyball and paddleboard yoga.

Why It's On Our Radar

Hyatt Vivid Punta Cana is shaping up to be more than another Caribbean resort. By combining modern design, approachable luxury and a flexible approach to all-inclusive vacations, it's carving out a space for travellers who want connection and comfort without the constraints. Scheduled to open in early 2026, it's one to watch for your next adults-only escape.



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Playas de Cabeza de Toro, La Altagracia, Dominican Republic

DISCOVERING THE MANY SIDES OF *Myrtle Beach*

Go for the beach, but stay
(and come back for) the food,
fun and southern charm

BY STEPHANIE HENRY & KAYLA WILLIAMS



Often known for its miles of sandy shoreline and lively boardwalk, Myrtle Beach has much more waiting to be uncovered beyond the waves. As two Canadian girlfriends exploring its food and culture scene, we found ourselves constantly surprised by how this coastal city blends southern charm, vibrant flavours and unique local experiences. What we discovered was more than just a beach town; it's a gem of a destination that deserves a spot on every travellers' list.

FOODIE FINDS BY THE BEACH

If Myrtle Beach had a love language, it would be food. Every stop along our trip brought a new flavour to the table along with tradition and coastal influence. We kicked things off at Swig & Swine, a spot that takes barbecue seriously. Their dry-rubbed wings and array of sauces were impressive but the real showstopper was the wood-smoked brisket that melted in our mouths, paired perfectly with their baked potato salad and beans. swigandswinebbq.com

For breakfast, Johnny D's Waffles and Benedicts quickly became a highlight. With three locations across Myrtle Beach, this diner felt like a neighbourhood Cheers, where the staff know your name and your order by heart. Chef Jamie Daskalis and her team serve up a menu that's massive yet intentional. The seafood omelette alone is worth the trip—rich, fresh and nearly impossible to recreate once you're back home. And if you're looking for indulgence? The cinnaroll pancakes are the stuff of legends. Don't sleep on them! johnnydswaffles.com

If you're craving something with a twist, Zeytin is a breakfast and lunch restaurant worth checking out. The vibe is warm and inviting, the staff are so pleasant and helpful and the menu balances traditional Turkish breakfast dishes with your go-to classics. It's the kind of spot that surprises you in the best way—with flavours that take you on an adventure. zeytinmb.com

Our favourite dining experience had to be dinner at Hook & Barrel—elevated coastal fine dining at its best. Think fresh, sustainable seafood with a southern twist. The standout? Honestly, it's hard to choose! For Kayla, it was the mahi mahi with coconut pineapple rice and for Steph, the starters stole the show. The candied bourbon bacon and the she crab soup are absolute must-orders. It's safe to say these meals will be living rent-free in our minds for a long time. Myrtle Beach's culinary scene is far richer and more exciting than many Canadians might expect from a beach town—and trust us, it's worth diving into.

hookandbarrelrestaurant.com



Johnny D's



Zeytin



Swig and Swine



Conway

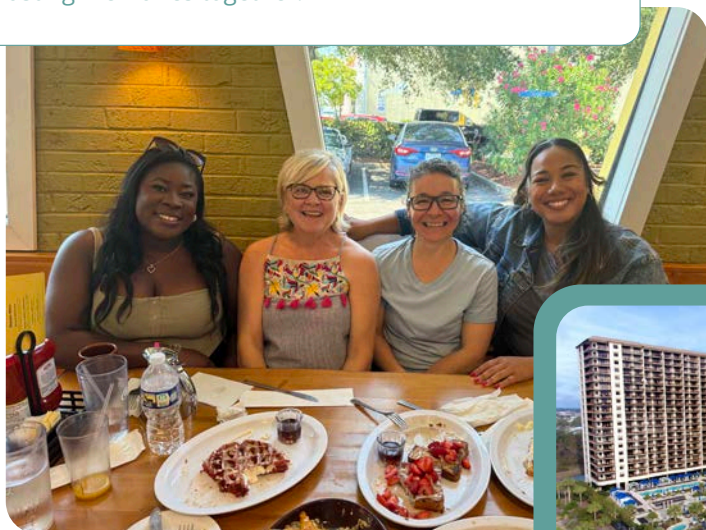
BEYOND THE BEACH BLANKET

It's no surprise that most people visit Myrtle Beach for... well, the beach. But we were pleasantly surprised at how much there was to explore beyond its shoreline. Brookgreen Gardens in Murrells Inlet offered a completely different kind of escape. Strolling through the beautifully landscaped gardens, we admired centuries-old live oaks and the impressive collection of American sculptures. The combination of art, history and natural beauty made it one of those places that stays with you long after you leave. brookgreen.org

We made our way over to Conway and visited the Horry County Museum, a fascinating peek into the area's natural and cultural history, reminding us that every beach town has stories beyond the sand. And as Myrtle Beach is known as the golf capital of the world, we unleashed our competitive sides at PopStroke, a mini golf experience designed in partnership with Tiger Woods that was equal parts playful and challenging. Live music and big screens with misting stations to keep you cool made it the kind of activity that reminded us vacations are meant for fun and making memories as much as for relaxation.

DID YOU KNOW?

Myrtle Beach is a Certified Autism Destination thanks to the work of the Autism Travel Club. Local hotels, attractions and restaurants receive training to create sensory-friendly experiences, making it possible for all families to plan vacations with confidence and create lasting memories together.



THE HEART OF MYRTLE BEACH

What really set Myrtle Beach apart wasn't just the food or attractions—it was the people. We spent most of our time exploring this beach town pretty incognito. Nobody really knew if we were locals or visitors writing about our experience. And yet, everywhere we went we were met with genuine warmth, kindness and an eagerness to make us feel right at home. Canadians may have their reasons for hesitating to head south right now, but Myrtle Beach deserves your consideration. It's a destination where you can truly expect to be welcomed with open arms. Southern hospitality wasn't just a phrase here—it showed up in every smile, every conversation and every small act of kindness that made our stay unforgettable.

Kayla and Steph's Favourites

It's only fair we each share our standout memory from our trip.



► **Kayla's Favourite:** Our sunset ride on the SkyWheel overlooking Myrtle Beach and dinner at Hook & Barrel.

► **Steph's Favourite:** For me, it was early morning beach walks catching the sunrise and lunch at Swig & Swine.

Whether it was the mouthwatering food, the unexpected gems or the warmth of the locals, Myrtle Beach proved to be so much more than a seaside escape. For Canadians looking beyond the shoreline, it's a destination full of flavour, culture and charm—a true hidden gem waiting to be discovered.



THE PERFECT HOME AWAY FROM HOME

Our home base in Myrtle Beach was North Beach Resort & Villas, and it couldn't have been a better fit. Think spacious condo-style units perfect for us as a duo, but would easily suit a family or group of friends. Our

balcony gave us just the right view of the resort's pool area and the sparkling Atlantic just beyond. The perfect spot for your morning coffee. Best of all, the resort's location put us just minutes away from Myrtle Beach's top restaurants and attractions, making it both convenient and relaxing.

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VisitMyrtleBeach.ca



A Perfect Girls' Getaway IN WINDSOR ESSEX

Adventure, wineries and whimsy combine for an unforgettable three days exploring a beautiful and multifaceted part of Southern Ontario

BY TAMMY CECCO

There is something magical about a road trip with your best friends—the kind where windows are down, playlists are blasting and laughter echoes along every highway mile. Our destination was one of Ontario's hidden gems: Windsor Essex. This is a region brimming with natural beauty, charming towns and a surprisingly robust food and drink scene. Over three days we discovered that this destination checked all of our boxes for the perfect girl's getaway.

From Calm Waters to the Edge of the Country

We started our trip with some much-needed fresh air and a dose of adventure. Kayaking with Pelee Wings Outfitters through the marsh at Point Pelee National Park was the perfect way to take a break from fast paced city life. We paddled through one of the largest remaining marshes in southern Ontario, which was alive with the hum of nature—dragonflies hovered nearby, birds called out in the distance and the water rippled gently beneath our paddles. For anyone looking for a way to unplug and reconnect with nature, this is an absolute must. peleewings.ca

After our paddle, we took a walk to the tip of Point Pelee, (affectionately known as "The Tip") which is the southernmost point of mainland Canada. There's something poetic about feeling the wind off Lake Erie and realizing you're at the very edge of the country. It's a great spot for photos and a reminder of the simple joys that come from a day spent outdoors.



Local Finds

The next morning we hit Kingsville Main Street. **JOE. Hot+Cold** is a great place to grab a freshly made breakfast sandwich and fuel up for wandering along Main Street's charming hub of boutiques and artisan shops. The two-level coffee shop is made for lingering and filled with fun décor. joecoffeeatthegrove.com

Windblown & Weathered offers quirky décor and home accents that inspired our inner interior designers.

Local Flavors: Lunch and Tasting Flights

Our next stop was Cured Craft Brewing Co., a small batch brewery in the town of Leamington where we indulged in a tasting flight and some delicious appetizers. Curate your flight with their classics or augment from the seasonal menu. Staff are very knowledgeable and can guide you to the perfect beer choices for your palate. curedcraftbrewing.com

Dinner that evening was at The Goose Kitchen & Bar, a local favourite in the town of Kingsville known for its approachable classics with an elevated twist. The atmosphere is warm and welcoming, perfect for a girls' night out filled with conversation, laughter and of course, indulgent cocktails. Don't miss the parmesan artichoke appetizer (it's no wonder it comes so highly recommended), the Lake Erie fish and chips, or their justifiably famous pizzas. thegoosekitchenandbar.com



A curated flight
at Cured Craft
Brewing Co.



From the Vine: Sipping Through Windsor Essex

No girls' road trip is complete without wine and Windsor Essex delivers in spades. We selected a few wineries from the many dotting the area and made a day out of sipping and savouring both the unique wines as well as the diverse and beautiful settings of our chosen wineries. Here are a few I would recommend when you're in the region.

→ **Oxley Estate Winery** was our first stop and the team here impressed us with their hospitality and encouragement to step outside of our wine comfort zones. They even convinced us to try their chardonnay (none of us are typically fans) and we were pleasantly pleased; so much so I even bought a bottle. We loved their creative music pairings to accompany each label. Think sipping chardonnay with notes of roasted Meyer lemon, golden delicious apples and jammy apricot while listening to "Here Comes the Sun" by The Beatles. Oxleyestatewinery.com

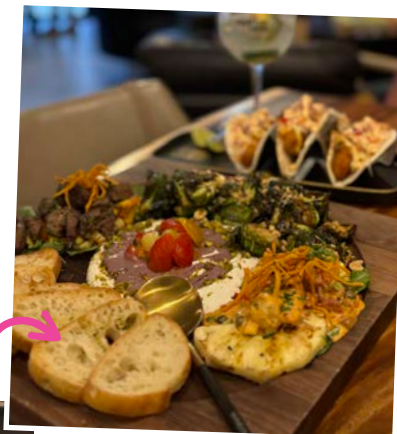
→ **Sprucewood Estates** was our next stop and conveniently, just in time for lunch. Nestled by the water, Ontario's only beachfront winery not only offers excellent wines, but stunning vistas where the water meets the vineyards. We lingered on the patio, tasting crisp whites and enjoying the decadently curated picnic basket on the menu. This winery's unique location definitely left an impression on us. After all, where else can you tour a winery and scour for seashells in one spot? Sprucewoodshores.com

→ **Pelee Island Winery**, the oldest winery in the area, provided a sense of history alongside our tasting. The rustic charm made each sip feel like part of a larger story. Our host made us feel right at home and gave us some great recommendations for the rest of our trip through Windsor Essex. Peleeisland.com

→ **Viewpointe Estate Winery** rounded out our day with sweeping vineyard views and the kind of quiet, contemplative spaces that encourage you to enjoy not just the wine, but every moment itself. They were in the midst of prepping for their annual Perch-a-Palooza festival celebrating local music and fresh-caught fish, an event we were sorry we were going to miss. Viewpointewinery.com

Such a memorable day had to be closed out by a special dinner and Wineology was the perfect spot. Buzzing with locals and tourists alike, the atmosphere was vibrant and the food delicious. It has great sharing plates along with more substantial entrees and an extensive international wine list. If you're lucky enough to be there on a weekend, you can pair your meal with live local music.

Wineologybar.ca



All good things must come to an end

Sadly, our carefree girls' getaway was wrapping up and it was back to our hotel, the lovely Heart & Hops Brewery Suites, to check out. But before leaving we had lunch at its craft brewery located below the inn, The Banded Goose, for our last local ale experience before heading home. The atmosphere is casual and on a sunny summer day, the outdoor patio with adjacent food truck is the heart of Kingsville.

bandedgoosebrewing.com



Ending With Some Floral Fun

On our way out of town, we made the perfect pit stop at Colour Pop Florals where we each got to pick and assemble our own bouquet of dahlias. It was a delightful way to slow down, celebrate creativity and take a piece of the region home with us and support their efforts to make sustainably grown flowers available to the community year round. Walking away with a vase full of colourful blooms felt symbolic—a little reminder of the fun, laughter and memories we created during our trip.

colourpopflorals.com

A girls' road trip isn't just about where you go; it's about the stories that emerge along the way. In Windsor Essex, we found a perfect mix of outdoor adventure, culinary exploration and small-town charm. From paddling through marshes and standing at Canada's southernmost tip, to sipping wine on sun-drenched patios, this trip was a celebration of life, friendship and discovery.

Perfect ending to a girls' getaway!

Some of the fun nods to beer at the inn

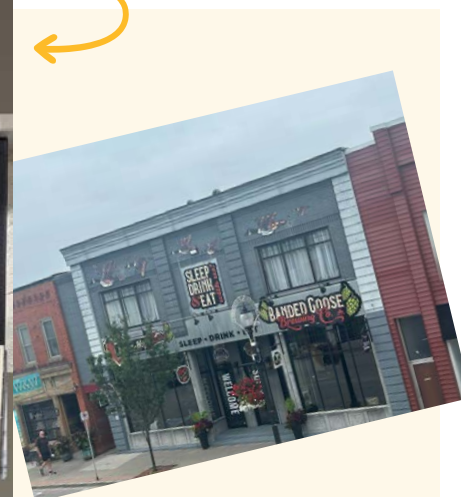
WHERE TO STAY

Sleep, sip and unwind at Hearts & Hops

Cozy and full of character, Hearts & Hops Brewery Suites, part of Distinctive Inns of Kingsville, is the perfect base for a Windsor Essex getaway. Located on Kingsville's Main Street, its comfortable rooms, welcoming atmosphere and thoughtful touches throughout make it much more than just a place to sleep—it's part of the experience.

Located close to the region's top attractions, the property makes discovering wineries, shops and local adventures effortless. Each brewery-themed room is a nod to craft beer and the Brew Master's Suite where we stayed was the ultimate cozy retreat after a day of exploring. Spacious, with two separate sleeping areas, the suite lends itself to travellers who share exploring interests, but maybe not sleeping habits. Each time we returned to Hearts & Hops, it felt like we were coming home.

distinctiveinnsofkingsville.com/brewery-suites



Barbados

BEYOND THE BEACH

This inviting island will impress you with its stunning surroundings but the warmth of the locals is what makes the deepest impression

Words and photos by Chloe Wilde



The Crane Resort

When people think of vacationing in the Caribbean, they often imagine blue seas, swaying palms and possibly, that unmistakable snap of a plastic wristband or a buffet line that never seems to end. But in Barbados, indulgence is never one-size-fits-all; it's personal, genuine and curated. Whether that means a private catamaran ride to a secluded snorkelling spot, a sumptuous seaside meal, or afternoon tea served with a touch of British charm, Barbados is here to remind you you're exactly where you need to be.



► THE CRANE: A WARM WELCOME WITH A SIDE OF SERENITY

After a quick 10 minute drive from the airport, my partner and I were welcomed to The Crane Resort with open arms and a rum punch on arrival. With majestic ocean views and a pod of pools at the centre, the resort is both inviting and transportive. Once we settled in, we strolled over to Zen restaurant and said yes to multiple orders of sushi with waves crashing just below. I would go back for the Laughing Buddha Roll alone. This first night set the tone for our adventure: thoughtful luxury with a side of Bajan beauty. TheCrane.com



Fresh flavours at Zen

Memorable
Moment:



Our favourite part of The Crane was how it felt like home, complete with fully equipped suites that encourage you to relax into island life.

Memorable Moment:

Our personal favourite was snorkelling in a quiet bay among sea turtles during our day on the water.



► A DAY ON THE WATER & DINNER WITH A VIEW

There is something unique about shifting your vantage point and taking in the landscape around you from a boat. If you're in Barbados, that experience should definitely be with Cool Runnings aboard their sleek luxury catamaran featuring bedrooms, bathrooms, air conditioning, a full bar and kitchen, snorkelling equipment, stand up paddleboards, an epic sound system and the friendliest crew. Every detail felt designed with us in mind, something indicative of our entire time on the island.

To cap off our second day in Barbados we went for dinner at well-known waterfront hotspot, Changers and leaned into island flavours like coconut shrimp, spiced shrimp tacos and the special of the day which was fresh ahi tuna with a side of quinoa and roasted vegetables.



Cool Runnings



Changers Restaurant



► ATLANTIC VIBES: HISTORY AND HIGH TIDES

The next morning, we headed east. The Atlantic side of Barbados feels wilder, moodier and more rugged. While driving across the country, our wonderful driver, Karon was kind enough to show us around and couldn't help but beam with pride when asked about what makes the people of Barbados so special. "Everyone looks out for everyone. Everyone knows everyone. If you have clothes out on the line and it's about to rain, your neighbour will bring them in for you." The loyalty and sense of community among Bajan individuals is palpable and inspiring.

If you head east in Barbados, have lunch at the Atlantis Historic Inn and feel yourself stepping into a storybook where you get warm hospitality in a building that has stood for over a century. This is where we had our first Bajan fish cakes and it was easy to see why they're a favourite among regulars. They're crispy on the outside and fluffy and full of flavour on the inside.

Later that evening, we stepped back into a world of fine dining at The Tides. We were seated in the tree house section, an open-air pavilion featuring four romantically lit casuarina trees growing out of the floor and through the roof. This spot has a whimsical feel to it, with the added bonus of incredible cocktails and a chef that clearly pays great attention to detail.

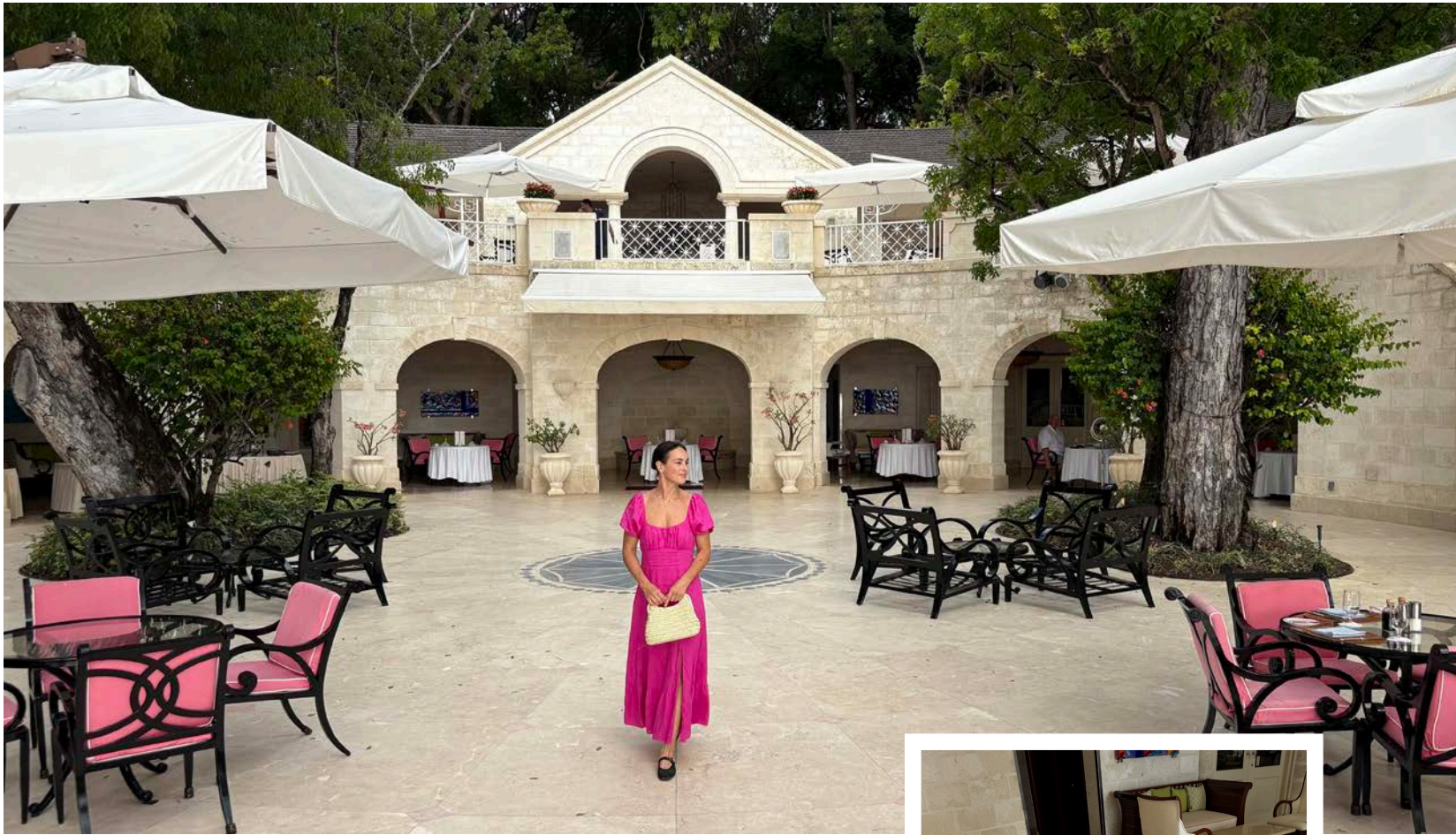


Fresh tuna tartare at The Tides



Memorable Moment:

At The Tides, I highly recommend the tartare of fresh Caribbean tuna with spicy watermelon and tomato gazpacho, and ending your meal with the sticky toffee pudding.



► THE GRAND FINALE

On our final day, we indulged in a double dose of delicious at Sandy Lane, known for its golf course and pink decor. Lunch at Bajan Blue was laid-back luxury at its best, where we enjoyed elevated local flavours by the beach. This was followed by afternoon tea which was simply delightful and a nod to the island's British history. With my partner being South African, we of course had to have the rooibos tea to compliment the tower of treats.

And then came our final dinner, at the brand-new UVA. A definite departure from the other restaurants we visited, UVA has a mediterranean flair with a hint of supper club energy with its' modern aesthetic and dance music playing in the background. We couldn't leave Barbados (nicknamed "the land of the flying fish") without trying the restaurant's flying fish "Boquerones Fritos Style" and it was an impressive and delicious dish. The crispy capers and anchovy aioli made it the superstar bite of the evening.



Memorable Moment:

Our meals at Sandy Lane and UVA were truly unforgettable.

What struck me the most about Barbados, above and beyond the ways it delivers on luxury, were the people that make this island so memorable. The warmth here is woven into every smile, every perfectly timed rum punch and every thoughtful detail. A wonderful local man we met named Andre summed it up best: "I live where most people dream to vacation."



You can't arrive in Prince Edward County without driving through an auspicious scene of opening credits: handwritten signs for firewood and farm stands punctuate a quilt of agricultural fields and wildflower meadows, with the occasional suggestion to slow down for turtles and snakes.

Wellness isn't something you need to search for in the county. Instead, it seems to greet you on arrival, a sense of ease and contentment permeating both the natural and cultural landscapes.

A Deeply Restorative Getaway in **Prince Edward County**

It's almost impossible not to find your very own slice of calm and serenity in this scenic part of southern Ontario

BY NICOLA BROWN

● Where to stay

The Royal Hotel in Picton is equal parts elevated escape and cultural anchor for an unmistakably PEC ethos. The boutique property's historic Victorian shell, once a pillar of the county's high society then left to decay for almost a decade, has found new life in a breezy, characterful and rooted approach to design, food, rest and relaxation.

Scandi and mid-century details—think warm wood slat walls, natural stones and sun-baked textiles in terracotta hues—seamlessly co-exist with enlivened nods to the past. A fresh take on a traditional Tartan pattern with a pop of yellow gets carried from carpet runners through bathroom mosaics, while rippling ceiling medallions hint at both the decadence and water-logged decay of bygone eras. The overall vibe invites some nourishing self-reflection that seems pertinent to the challenging times we're living in; how can we reconcile our competing desires for stability and change? Hotel manager Sol Korngold—who's been through his own share of paradigm-shifting life events—might say

that The Royal's hard-won, passionate and personal new lease on life is rooted in respect for the role that such opposing forces play in shaping identity.

Choose an Empire room with a bedside soaker tub and fireplace for the most restorative experience. A wellness menu contains three different pillow options, bath and shower add-ons like the vegan-friendly Bathorium soak infused with fir needles and glacial clay, along with extra comforts including a Sage diffuser, lavender pillow mist, a silky eye mask and even a therapy lamp with white noise. The spacious bathroom has a double vanity, heavy cotton robes, Dyson hairdryers and county-based Telford amenities.

In the hotel's dimly lit lower-level spa, you quickly forget you're on the high street. Personalized facials are carefully choreographed for uninterrupted relaxation while addressing skin concerns with sustainable Italian skincare line Comfort Zone. If you like a bit of heat with your hygge, ask about reserving a spot for personal training team Coach Haus's bootcamp in the hotel gym on Wednesday mornings.

● How to disconnect

It's worth reserving at least half a day for the Thermal Escape at Wander the Resort's newly-opened waterfront Nordic spa just outside Wellington. This semi-subterranean oasis comprises hot, warm, cool and cold-plunge pools, cascading waterfalls, saunas, steam rooms, peaceful lounge areas and access to a private white sandy beach with hammocks, cabanas and loungers. The restful, minimalist design of this sophisticated retreat exists in perfect harmony with the raw natural beauty of the county's landscape. Take advantage of an hourly aufguss sauna ritual; a guided 10-minute experience with music, towel waving and essential oil-infused balls of ice scooped onto hot stones for a crescendo of heat, steam and scent. Cool off after with a cold plunge and a tall glass of lemon water.

For something that dives a little deeper into mental wellbeing, book yourself a two-hour Soul Float session at The Love Loft in Bloomfield. The experience combines the benefits of a sound bath, guided meditation and reiki into one. Embrace a feeling of cocooned weightlessness as you float atop a giant beanbag, legs dangling into the warmth of an outdoor saltwater pool, gently gliding in and out of shade and sunlight. If you're looking to release some deeply-held emotions, or just want a way to tune in to the county's much sought-after tranquillity, this is the place to do it.



● What to eat and drink

Farm-to-table dining isn't a new idea in the county, it's been a way of life since the peninsula's first Indigenous inhabitants grew corn, beans and squash, evolving into a rich tapestry of farms, crops, livestock and vineyards today.

At the Royal Hotel's Italian-inspired restaurant, a wide arched opening flanked by curtains casts the open kitchen as a stage. Here chef Albert Ponzo, formerly of Le Sélect in Toronto, performs his most authentic act yet: an unfussy tasting menu informed by hyper-local, seasonal ingredients direct from the hotel's own Edwin County Farms. Stripped of pretention, dishes allow the rich flavour of just-picked ingredients to do most of the talking. Heirloom tomatoes with stracciatella get just a splash of aged balsamic, topped with fresh basil. Local-caught pickerel sits atop a crispy bed of corn and snap peas. To finish, a perfectly tart haskap berry compote sets off a crisp and chewy almond-anise meringue. The wine list offers a solid representation of PEC's best local bottles alongside a curated selection of international options.

But the best way to appreciate the county's distinctive viticulture is to hop on a bike and visit some family-run vineyards in person. Share a glass or two with owners Sherry and Saxe under the weathered wooden beams of an early-1800s barn at Karlo Estates. Start with the 2023 Three Witches (a crisp, complex white) or the 2022 Triumvirate (a Bordeaux-style red) to get a good feel for what they're all about. Here you'll learn about the improbable tangles of love, loss and

resilience that have shaped one of the county's most innovative, award-winning wineries. As one of the world's first vegan-certified wineries, everything from your cheese platter to the ink on the wine labels is vegan, though you'd probably never guess.

Continue your exploration at Huff Estates where you can grab a glass—try an unoaked chardonnay or pinot noir—to wander the winding paths of a peaceful sculpture garden at the adjacent Oeno Gallery, exhibiting a rotating selection of local and international artists that invite a deeper reflection on our place in the world. Or discover how giving vines left for dead a second chance can yield one of the county's most celebrated sauvignon blancs at The Grange of Prince Edward.

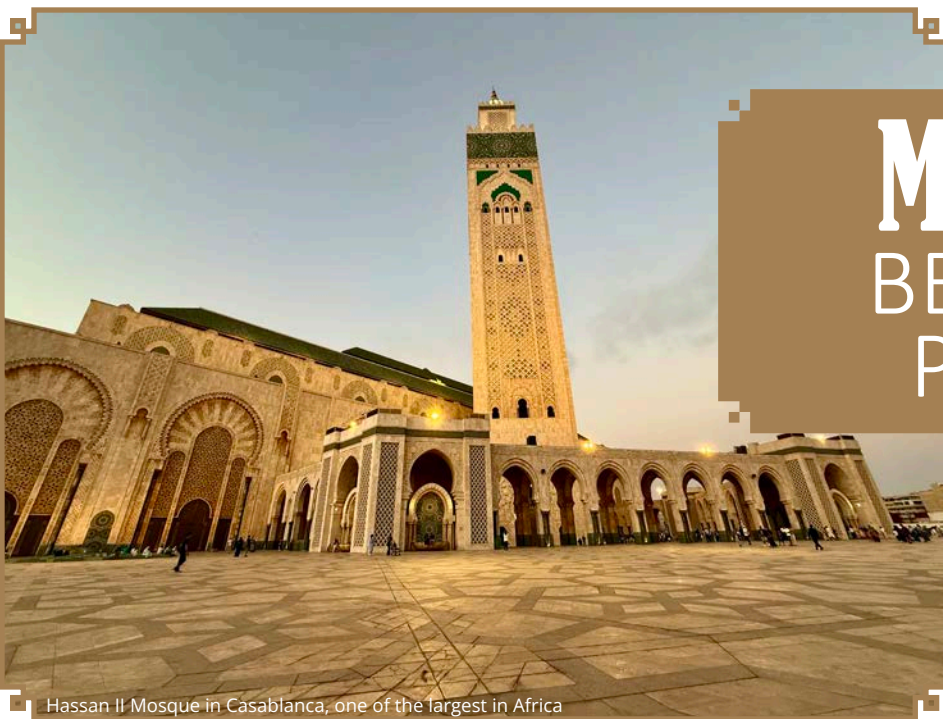
If you choose to linger at Wander the Resort's spa, head to on-site restaurant Gather for a light bite—try the torched cured tuna with pickled cucamelon, corn nuts and grapefruit, or the chunky beet salad with goat cheese, spiced pistachios and pickled rhubarb—and a glass of local bubbles. If you're not quite ready to shed the bathrobe, you can grab one of the most serene seats in the house, out on the deck facing the water.



Spotlight: Savon du Bois

Take an afternoon to discover the boutique local shops on Picton's high street. Savon du Bois creates scent-driven collections of hair, body and wellness products—with names like Summer Daydream, Midnight Liaison and Into the Woods—honed by a desire to connect with our most evocative memories. Each scent collection tells a snippet of a story in chapters. Into the Woods' rosemary, bergamot and juniper shampoo reads: *VI: Discovering a small cove, the day being mild, you swam with the minnows.* It's all local, ethical and plant-based.

A getaway to Prince Edward County is replete with optimistic shifts in perspective. The opportunities run deep, with everything from sensory to philosophical nourishment at hand. Perhaps the most lasting comfort you'll leave with is a reminder that even in the eye of the storm, we can still find places of peace.



Morocco, BEYOND THE POSTCARD

A colourful and unforgettable journey into Casablanca, Essaouira and Marrakech

Words and photos by Nicole Servinis

Hassan II Mosque in Casablanca, one of the largest in Africa

When I pictured Morocco, I imagined bustling souks, mosaicked riads and the smell of spices wafting through the air. What I didn't expect was how personal and seamless the experience would feel thanks to having a host like Nezik. As a Moroccan-born travel specialist, she curates immersive journeys that seamlessly blend culture, authenticity and discovery while showing you Morocco from the inside out. On my first trip, I had the pleasure of exploring the country under her guidance, where every detail was thoughtfully designed to awaken the senses. moroccowithnezik.com



Jardin Majorelle in Marrakech

A Feast for the Senses

Moroccan cuisine isn't just food—it's a love letter to the senses. Breakfasts stretched into feasts. Think Msemen (flaky fried dough), homemade fig jams, eggs and coffee served in delicate ceramics. Lunch and dinner were symphonies of spice. Standouts included kefta tagine, bubbling in its clay pot; chicken tagine, slow-cooked until it fell apart at the touch of a fork; and chicken pastilla, pastry layered with meat, almonds and a dusting of sugar—a unique blend of sweet and savoury that turned out to be an unexpected favourite.

And then there was the ritual of mint tea, poured high into glass cups. Fragrant, fresh and always paired with almond cookies, tea here isn't just a drink—it's a welcome, a moment of connection and the chance to press pause.



Chicken tagine

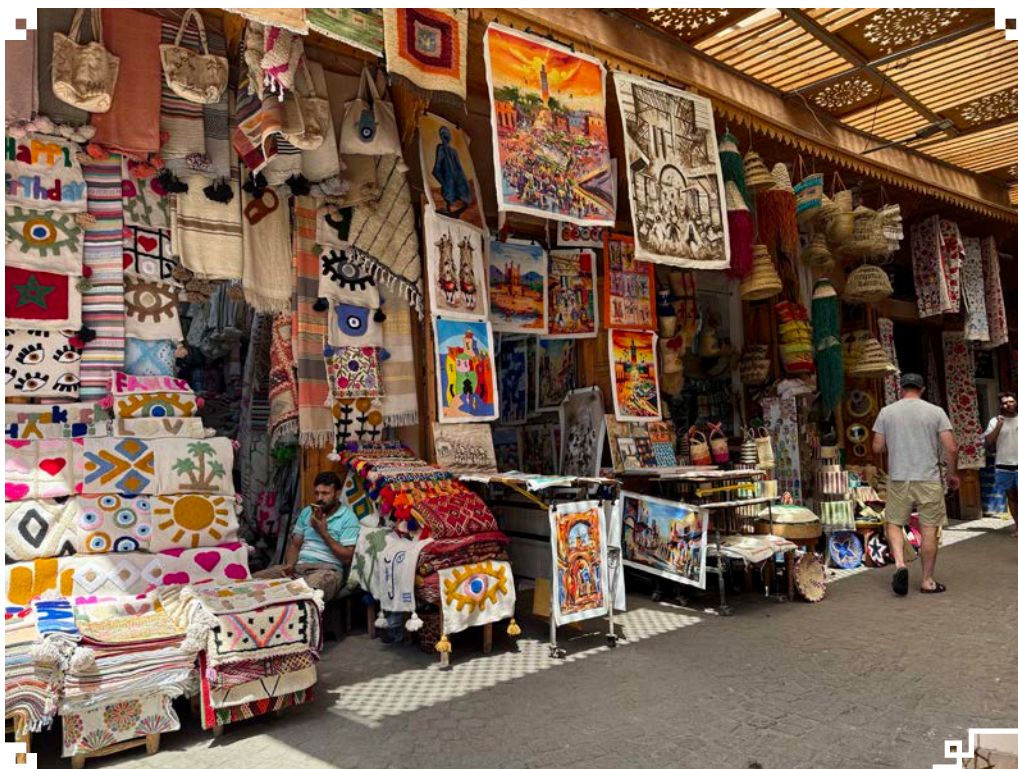
The Luxury of a Host

If travel is usually a puzzle of logistics, Nezik made it feel like a seamless dream. From private transfers to handpicked riads, everything was effortless. She tailored the trip exactly to our rhythm, whether we wanted to dive into the energy of the medina or slow down with a quiet mint tea. The riads she chose were destinations in themselves. From the outside, they were discreet; almost unassuming. But walk through the doors and you're transported: mosaic-tiled courtyards, vibrant colours, the sweet swirl of incense. It was like stepping into a hidden jewel box where every detail whispered Morocco's story.



Soul-Stirring Sights

Each Moroccan city I visited had its own distinct colours. Casablanca, the white city, gave us the Hassan II Mosque, glowing golden at sunset as the call to prayer filled the air. Marrakech, the red city, was bold and alive. At Jardin Majorelle, I stood before walls painted in "Majorelle blue," a striking shade of cobalt. Surrounded by exotic plants from five continents, it felt like I'd stepped into a painting. The gardens are named for Jacques Majorelle, the French artist who created them (and that now-iconic shade of blue). Essaouira, the breezy blue-and-white coastal town, is where the sea air touches everything and the UNESCO-listed medina is filled with history along with artisan quarters alive with crafts passed down through generations.



Where Craft and Culture Connect

If Morocco is a feast for the senses, the souks are its banquet table. Wandering through, I found myself surrounded by silverwork, hand-tooled leather, lanterns casting shadows of stars and rugs so intricate they seemed to hold entire stories in their threads. One highlight was visiting a women's argan oil co-op. Watching Amazigh women hand-crack nuts from trees that have stood for centuries and turning them into oils, butters and even honey, was humbling. They're not just artisans—they're the backbone of their families and communities.

I left with treasures: a supple leather duffle bag, handmade shoes and silver jewelry. But more than the items themselves, it was the pride of authentic craftsmanship that has stayed with me.

Unforgettable Moroccan Moments

Morocco is as much about experiences as it is about sights, and no visit is complete without a traditional hammam. The steam, exfoliating scrubs and natural black soap treatments left my skin glowing and my spirit completely renewed. Riding camels at sunset felt cinematic, like stepping into a film reel. Evenings brought belly dancing, traditional Gnawa rhythms and Sephardic melodies—a cultural symphony where different cultures and religions blended seamlessly.

And then there was the hot air balloon ride. Floating 625 metres above the Atlas Mountains at sunrise, the silence was broken only by the occasional roar of the flame. I looked out over a horizon dotted with other balloons and felt tears stream down my face. It was pure magic—an image that will forever live in my mind.



Local music at Le Love by Caravane in Essaouira

The Call to Return

Seven days, three cities, endless memories—and yet Morocco still has so much to offer. Next time, I'll chase the desert dunes of the Sahara, hike the Atlas peaks and wander the storybook blue streets of Chefchaouen. Morocco is not just a destination. It's a kaleidoscope of colour, cuisine, history and heart. And with the right host, it becomes something even rarer: a place that feels like your own

FIVE MEMORABLE DAYS ON FLORIDA'S GULF COAST

By Jessica Padykula

Sun, sand and rich coastal character stretch from Bradenton and Anna Maria Island to St. Pete–Clearwater, proving this area of Florida is always worth visiting

I still have vivid memories of visiting Florida as a nine-year-old, never wanting to leave the beach despite my parents' pleas to pack up so we could go get something to eat. Since then, I've returned to the Sunshine State many times, and each visit has revealed surprises that remind me Florida is never a one-hit wonder. This trip took me through Bradenton, Anna Maria Island and St. Pete–Clearwater, each with its own personality and reasons to not only visit, but plan a return trip.

BRADENTON/ ANNA MARIA ISLAND

I started off in Bradenton and nearby Anna Maria Island. Anna Maria Island is a narrow barrier island home to quiet beaches, bike-friendly streets, an historic pier and casual restaurants. Nearby Bradenton is equally charming but feels more lively. The waterfront is bustling and riverfront parks make it easy to spend time by the water. The Gulf Islands Ferry is a scenic and convenient way to travel between the two.

MUST-DO

A great antidote for a long morning spent in transit turned out to be fresh air and exercise. After checking in and dropping my bags I joined a guided kayak tour through Robinson Preserve, which spans over 600 acres of mangroves, paddling trails, walking and biking paths, coastal wetlands and salt marshes. The leisurely-paced paddle not only energized me but provided a great introduction to the region's natural beauty.

Another highlight on the water was a dolphin-spotting trip with Paradise Boat Tours. At first, it seemed like luck wasn't on our side, but halfway through the ride, dolphins appeared, leaping and surfacing alongside our boat being their adorable, playful selves. Every dolphin sighting was met with an eruption of cheers—it's no wonder they kept popping up to see us.



St Petersburg Beach

Though I'm no longer the type of person who can spend endless hours on the sand, I was looking forward to checking out Cortez Beach on the southern side of Anna Maria Island and I'm glad I did. This is white sand at its softest and most postcard-worthy. The long, wide beach was made for long walks by the water and if you love to hunt for shells (as I do), the variety here is staggering.

Back on land, historic Bridge Street in Bradenton Beach is lined with brightly painted shops, casual restaurants and small cafés making it a fun and laid back place to explore, browse for souvenirs and soak in some of what makes this area so inviting.



Dolphin spotting

MUST-TASTE

The Doctor's Office is a stylish spot with a whimsical patio made for lingering. Expertly-crafted cocktails are almost too pretty to drink, the menu is varied but well-curated and all of the bread, tortillas and desserts are made in-house. There's a great mix of sharable appetizers like the robust Mediterranean platter and larger mains, including several types of tacos.

Warm interiors with dark wood accents and soft lighting make The Waterfront Restaurant instantly inviting. The building itself goes back to 1922 so there's history baked into the walls. The



The Doctor's Office

seafood-focused dishes are simple, fresh and flavourful, letting the ingredients shine without overcomplicating what's on the plate. You likely won't go wrong with whatever the day's fresh catch is.

A great spot for lunch after a morning at the beach turned out to be Beach House Waterfront Restaurant, which puts you right on the sand. Fresh seafood and playful cocktails complement views of the water and the relaxed, beachfront atmosphere embodies some of the best things about Anna Maria Island. I would definitely go back for the crispy brussels sprouts and vibrant farm salad.

MUST-STAY

Silver Surf Gulf Beach Resort was a relaxing base for my time in the area. The rooms, decorated with easygoing coastal touches, make you feel at home. The property sits right across from the beach, so it takes no time to get from your room to the sand. Some convenient complementary perks include beach chairs, umbrellas and beach towels, as well as grab and go breakfast. There's also a heated pool, bike rentals available and a grilling area on site.



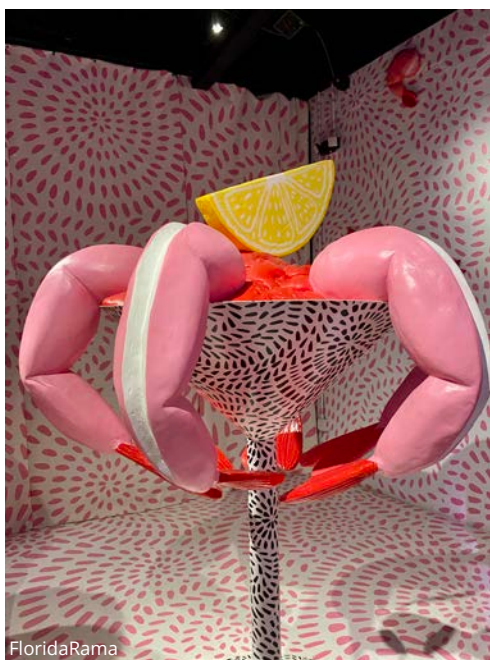
Silver Surf Gulf Beach Resort

ST. PETE-CLEARWATER

Having not been to this area since I was a kid, I was looking forward to getting reacquainted with St. Pete-Clearwater. The award-winning white-sand beaches remain, but there's so much more to explore here, from world-class museums and street art that makes you stop in your tracks, to innovative dining and inviting local neighbourhoods that highlight the city's creative spirit.

MUST-DO

One of those noteworthy neighbourhoods is the Warehouse Arts District, a former industrial area now home to a maze of galleries, muralled-walls and artist studios mixed with breweries, local shops and event spaces. It's hard not to feel energized in this area and it's worth devoting at least a couple of hours to gallery-hop.



FloridaRama

Inside the district, Zen Glass Studio & Gallery is part workshop and part gallery space where you can try glassblowing for yourself. I was apprehensive at first, but the instructors are extremely patient and break everything down into manageable steps. The process is surprisingly meditative and by the end, you've created something tangible—in my case a small glass pendant I gifted to my mom.

Also in the area, FloridaRAMA takes creativity in a whole new direction. It's part immersive installation and part funhouse, with each room designed to surprise you. Created by over 75 artists all from the state of Florida, some spaces lean whimsical, others a little surreal, but the through-line is pure playfulness. It's the perfect place to let yourself feel like a kid again while also being exposed to some seriously impressive art that also happens to be a lot of fun.



Anna Maria Island

For a change of pace, Shell Key Preserve offers white sand and crystal-clear water everywhere you turn. This 1,800-acre preserve protects sensitive marine habitats and the best way to explore is by kayak, something easily done with Get Up and Go Kayaking. You'll paddle calm waters spotting birds and stopping at sandbars for a truly relaxing experience.

MUST-TASTE

Despite being exhausted after a day of sightseeing, I felt reinvigorated as soon as I arrived at 3 Daughters Brewing. It has become a local staple for good reason, partly because of the sheer variety on tap and partly because of the atmosphere. The sprawling patio and warehouse-size taproom never make you feel anything but welcome and the beer is excellent. If you're feeling competitive, there's cornhole on site.

For something cozier, Lolita's Wine Market is equal parts dreamy date night spot and buzzing wine bar. It's easy to tell why so many people gravitate here. The menu leans into charcuterie, decadent spreads and tapas-style plates meant to be shared. You can go for one of their signature boards, or mix and match among the wide selection of meats, cheeses and extras like olives, jams, dried fruit and pickled vegetables.

The last dinner of my trip was at Grace, a laid back yet elegant restaurant with warm service, lots of energy and creative dishes. The menu here changes seasonally and highlights local ingredients wherever possible. Their rotating flatbreads are decadent and great for sharing and flavours here are meant to wake up your palate in the best way possible.

MUST-STAY

Hotel Zamora is a boutique stay that leans into bright, modern design with large, comfortable rooms that make it easy to spread out. I particularly loved the property's pool area, complete with large sundeck, a bar, comfy lounge chairs and fluffy towels. There's direct access to the beach, as well as use of complementary kayaks and bicycles. Don't miss a drink or two at Azura Sundown Rooftop & Lounge which has great drinks and unbelievable sunset views.

This trip easily proved my theory that Florida is a destination that keeps on giving, no matter how many times you visit. Bradenton/Anna Maria Island and St. Pete-Clearwater each bring their own flavour to the Gulf Coast, and together they make the case for coming back again and again.



3 Daughters Brewing



Hotel Zamora

A CITY WORTH SAVOURING

Tucson is a city that makes an impression pretty quickly, with its scenic desert backdrop, historic architecture and laid-back vibes. That same inviting spirit comes through in Tucson's food and tasting your way through the city is one of the most authentic ways to experience it. That, combined with some excellent places to stay, made for a trip that will stay with me for a long time to come.

By Gurdeep Ahluwalia

Hotels with Character

Tucson isn't just a place you visit—it's a whole mood. And nowhere captures that enticing spirit better than Hacienda Del Sol Guest Ranch Resort where I spent three nights. Nestled in the Catalina Foothills, this historic retreat began as a girls' boarding school in the 1920s before transforming into a luxe hideaway for Hollywood stars like Spencer Tracy and Katharine Hepburn. Today, it's all adobe-style charm, vibrant gardens, sweeping mountain views and one of the best al fresco dining spots in town. The terrace at The Grill was a highlight, especially at sunset when the desert sky tends to steal the show.

If Hacienda is where you unwind, Hotel Congress is where you plug into Tucson's beating heart. Located downtown, this 1919 landmark is part hotel and part cultural hub, featuring three live music venues, unique works of art and even a fully functional radio station broadcasting from its studio in the downstairs lobby. As someone who loves true crime, I was also drawn to the hotel's gangster-tinged past (John Dillinger stayed here after a string of bank robberies and was captured when the hotel caught fire). At Hotel Congress, the vintage vibes are strong, the people-watching is excellent and the bar scene is a local legend. Spending a few hours here felt like taking a sip of Tucson's personality—a little wild, a little retro and full of great stories.

Tanque Verde Ranch

Food with a Story

Why aren't more people doing Mexican-Italian fusion? I'm a sucker for a great story behind an even better meal and Zio Peppe absolutely delivers. When chef Mat Cable was designing the menu for his now-beloved Tucson restaurant, he had his heart set on a birria pizza. But no matter how many careful tries, he couldn't quite crack the code on the rich, slow-cooked flavour he wanted.

Enter chef Juan Almanza, owner of El Taco Rustico and affectionately known around town as the Birria King. The two had history: during the height of COVID, Mat quietly helped Juan innovate to keep his business afloat. Now, Juan was returning the favour—supplying his award-winning birria for what would become Zio Peppe's most popular dish.

That smoky, tender birria sits atop a crust made with mesquite flour and local wheat, served with consommé and lemon wedges for



Birria Pizza at Zio Peppe



Hacienda Del Sol

dunking. It's decadent, inventive and deeply Tucson. I devoured mine on a buzzy Thursday night, leaving full, happy and genuinely moved by the story. In a cutthroat industry, two top chefs lifting each other up? The world would be better off if more cities followed Tucson's altruistic lead.

Other must-visits: La Chaiteria for breakfast, Seis Kitchen, Barrio Bread.



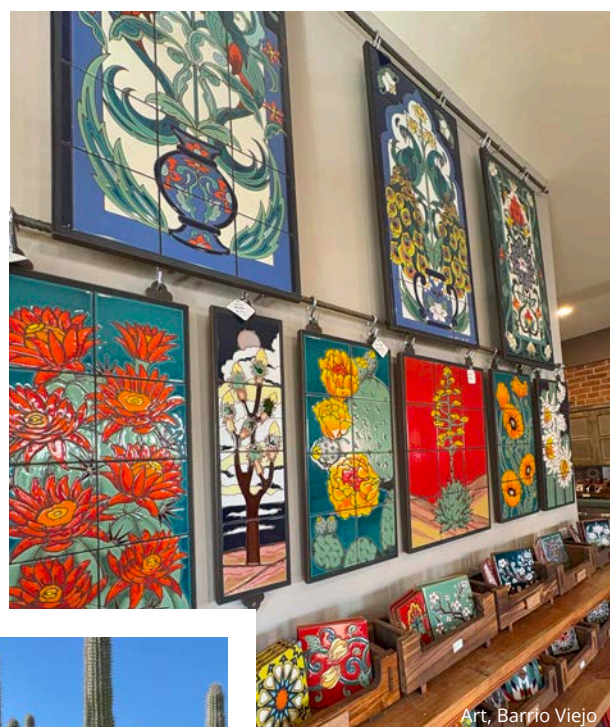
Hotel Congress



Rolli's Rolled Tacos



Chef Juan's Famous Birria Tacos at El Taco Rustico



Art, Barrio Viejo

A True Taste of the City

Tucson is one of only two UNESCO cities of gastronomy in the U.S. (with San Antonio being the other), so it's no wonder my top recommendation for how to spend your time here involves eating. If tacos are a religion, then South Tucson is sacred ground. This compact, culturally rich stretch is home to some of the best Sonoran-style tacos in the country. The best way to experience it? Take a food tour and hop taqueria to taqueria like a very hungry local.

What stood out to me was the variety. From sizzling street food to tucked-away family-run gems, each stop brought a different take—united by bold flavour and serious passion. We started at Taqueria Pico de Gallo, where the mouthwatering fish tacos were so fresh you'd think the Gulf of California was next door.

Next up was El Taco Rustico (yes, chef Jaun's place). He grills meat low and slow over charcoal using more than 30 spices. His birria tacos? You already know they're a must. The third stop was at El Guero Canelo, home to the James Beard Award winning Sonoran hotdog: a bacon-wrapped frank topped with beans, onions, tomato, mustard, mayo and jalapeño sauce—all nestled in a steamed bun.

Our final stop was Rolli's Mexican Patio where chef Mateo reimagines tradition with crispy rolled tacos smothered in toppings and sauce. These are crunchy, comforting and highly addictive. Between bites, soak in the murals, the lowriders and the warmth of locals who've perfected these flavours over generations. I'd suggest bringing a serious appetite, maybe some stretchy pants and planning for a post taco-tour siesta.



Sunrise horseback riding at Tanque Verde Ranch



Other must-dos: Mercado San Agustin (filled with restaurants and shops), Mission Garden, a sunrise horseback ride and fireside breakfast at Tanque Verde Ranch (offered Sundays and Thursdays), Barrio Viejo (a must-see historic neighbourhood)

Tucson reveals itself through its streets, its stories and the meals that bring them to life. In my experience, every bite is a taste of the city—and a very good reason to keep exploring.



Travel After Dark

Five properties reimagining evening entertainment by offering unique experiences when the sun goes down

By Jessica Padykula

How you spend your evenings when you travel depends a lot on where you are and who you're with, but more often than not a night out while away involves dinner and drinks, maybe some live music or a walk on the beach as the sun goes down. Lately though, a new nighttime travel trend has emerged known as noctourism, one that sees travellers seeking out unique after-dark experiences as a way to enrich their trip. In fact, Booking.com recently named noctourism one of its top travel trends for 2025.

From moonlit meditation and guided stargazing to twilight snorkelling, more destinations are tapping into the trend, and here are a few places to start.

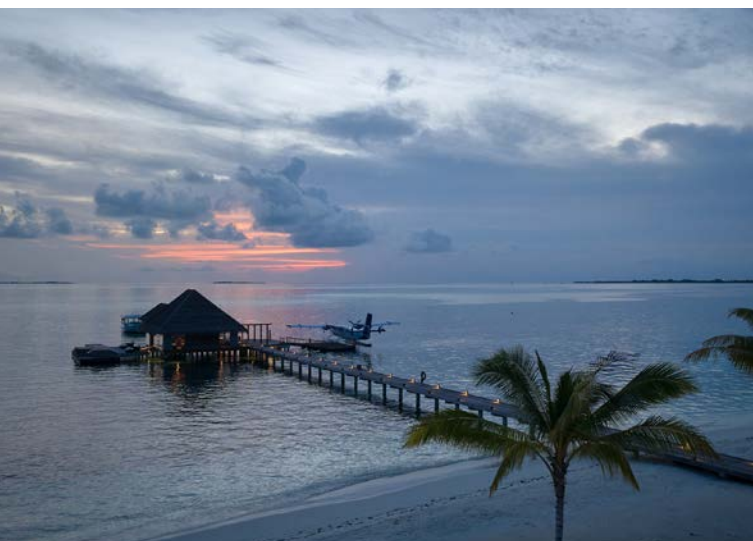


► Atlantis Paradise Island, The Bahamas

While you won't have to look far to find fun things to do at Atlantis Paradise Island (from multiple waterslides to over a dozen pools), their Marine Life Camping Adventure is especially unique. Sleep in climate-controlled luxury tents just steps from the water and explore the resort's extensive marine facilities after hours. You'll have the chance to visit the marine hospital, do some twilight snorkeling through underwater ruins and meet baby sea turtles and rescued dolphins.

► Six Senses Kanuhura, Maldives

At Six Senses Kanuhura, nighttime becomes a backdrop for deep sensory stillness. The resort's mindfulness-focused stargazing experience combines expert-led celestial observation with guided breathwork and meditation, beginning with telescopic views of the stars and ending with a reflective sound bath under the night sky. Held on the resort's jetty and framed by the ocean, the 60-minute session offers a unique opportunity to connect with the cosmos and quiet your mind.



► Hyatt Regency Maui Resort and Spa, Hawaii

Located on Ka'anapali Beach, this Maui resort is known for its excellent stargazing opportunities. Their signature "Tour of the Stars" is led by NASA Ambassador and the resort's Director of Astronomy, Edward Mahoney and gives guests access to expert insight into the 80 constellations visible from the property. During your session, you'll learn to identify various galaxies and planets just by looking up, then moving on to astronomy binoculars and finally to the resort's HD telescope, Hawaii's only recreational telescope with a 16-inch reflector.



► The Algonquin Hotel, New York City

Opened in 1902, this legendary hotel has long been providing guests with memorable experiences—and now they're making things even more interesting. The evening takes centre stage with the "Hex and the City" package. Created in collaboration with tarot reader and energy practitioner Cardsy B, the overnight offering includes a one-on-one evening reading with Cardsy B (virtual or in-person), tips on harnessing the moon's energy, as well as a branded tarot card deck and personalized guide to NYC.

► Vakkaru, Maldives

Movie night takes gets the VIP treatment at Vakkaru Maldives, where guests can book the resort's Private Jungle Cinema for a secluded screening beneath the palms. The open-air theatre experience includes unlimited popcorn and soft drinks served throughout, comfy giant bean bags and the Indian Ocean as your backdrop. There's also the option to add a multi-course jungle dinner and a stargazing session guided by the resort's team.



► More ways to embrace noctourism

In addition to stargazing and late night meditation sessions, there are many other ways to experience noctourism in your travels.

- **Seek out night markets:** Night markets are a mainstay in many parts of the world, giving you the chance to mingle with locals and wander from stall to stall sampling street food and browsing for souvenirs.
- **Embark on an evening wildlife tour:** Spot nocturnal creatures on guided safaris, turtle-watching trips, or nighttime forest walks.
- **Visit a museum at night:** Some galleries and museums offer after-hours tours or events which provide an entirely fresh way to experience local art and culture.
- **Kayak or paddleboard by moonlight:** Glide across calm waters under the stars for a calming way to end your evening.
- **Go on a nighttime food tour:** Sample your way through a city's street food scene during its liveliest hours.



JOURNEY TO THE HEART OF *JURASSIC WORLD REBIRTH*: A THRILLING THAI EXPEDITION

Go behind the scenes of the blockbuster's filming locations, with a side of luxe coastal
and jungle properties in Phuket and Krabi

BY MARRISKA FERNANDES

Thailand, known as the Land of Smiles, is a symphony of sensory experiences. The air is thick with the tantalizing aromas of street food; the fiery red of chili, the vibrant green of fresh lime and the rich yellow of turmeric-infused curries. The sounds of bustling city life are interspersed with the gentle chanting from ornate temples and the cheerful greetings of the Thai people.

It's no wonder that it's a go-to destination for everyone, including the film industry. Director Gareth Edwards has long been drawn to the beauty of Thailand, and it's fitting that the jungle and coastal landscape was a perfect backdrop for his latest film, *Jurassic World Rebirth*. To celebrate the home entertainment release of the film, I made my first trip to Thailand where Universal Pictures Home Entertainment gave us a once-in-a-lifetime experience.

"The people are ultra friendly and there's a great film crew here. Like, they're basically a film industry," said Edwards in an interview on a hot summer day in Phuket. "I also think this part of Southeast Asia is like where the ancient past meets a very

Miranda were in attendance. Nestled on a secluded cove along Phuket's sophisticated northwestern coast, Trisara is not merely a hotel, but a vibrant 40 acre sanctuary overlooking the sparkling Andaman Sea. Its very name, Sanskrit for "The Third Garden in Heaven," hints at the kaleidoscope of colour and natural beauty you're greeted with every evening as a fiery sunset takes over the sky.

Each private villa, equipped with its own infinity pool, is perched on a verdant hillside with breathtaking ocean views that melt into a deep sapphire horizon. This was one of the most luxurious hotels I've ever stayed at, with the villa's infinity pool being a personal slice of a cerulean dream, including delicious Thai meals and exceptional service. On my last day in Phuket, instead of sightseeing, I simply stayed in, taking in some much-needed Trisara private beach and pool time.

Our next destination, Krabi, was a world of its own. Given the lush limestone cliffs surrounding the pristine blue waters, it's no doubt that the prehistoric franchise fits right into this setting. A portion of

and feeling very primeval. Like something from Skull Island or somewhere you'd expect to see giant dinosaurs pop out." Blaise recalled a memorable hike in Krabi that involved climbing 1,260 steps to Tiger Cave Temple, a hike I also did and it was quite the experience.

We stayed at the stunning Rayavadee Resort, which is surrounded by lush trees that house friendly monkeys and monitor lizards—it really felt like an authentic jungle experience that paved the way for beautiful sea adventures, including kayaking and paddleboarding, as brightly coloured long-tail boats carved their way through the waves.

The resort has three beautiful beaches, including Railay Beach, where we got to let our inner thrill seeker out. We rock climbed just like the characters in the film. It was my first rock climbing adventure and one I'll never forget. For Edwards, his favourite place is Railay Beach, where he not only filmed *Jurassic* but also the opening scene of his previous film. I spent a few extra days at Rayavadee Resort, sipping coconut water by the pool overlooking the beach. I dwelled in inner peace as I caught a sunset or two, watched out for playful monkeys and dined at one of my favourite restaurants, Krua Phranang, which served the best Thai dishes I've ever had. This is a resort I'd highly recommend visiting when in Krabi.

It's no doubt the cast loved being back in Thailand to support the home entertainment release. "It's a beautiful country, I'm glad we're back," said Miranda. The landscapes were not merely a backdrop for *Jurassic World Rebirth*; they were a character in their own right. The



Rock climbing at Railay Beach

visceral experience of filming in these remote locations—scaling mountains and navigating a raw, untamed wilderness—allowed the cast, and myself, to tap into a genuine sense of adventure.

Jurassic World Rebirth is now available on digital platforms to own or rent and on 4K UHD, Blu-Ray & DVD.



Luna Blaise and Audrina Miranda at the reception at Trisara Resort

modern, forward-looking city. I find that contrast really exciting."

Phuket is an island where the colour palette of nature and culture blend so seamlessly that every view is a postcard. The reception for *Jurassic World Rebirth*, which is now available to watch at home, was held at the beautiful Trisara Hotel where cast members Luna Blaise and Audrina

the movie was filmed on location in Krabi, where a select group of global press got to recreate a scene from the film, one in which Scarlett Johansson and Jonathan Bailey witness majestic Titanosaurs in the grasslands. It was such an incredible moment getting to recreate an iconic scene in the film.

Edwards describes Krabi and Phang Nga Bay as having "such character



Trisara hotel villa

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IXTAPA ZIHUATANEJO



A breathtaking view from hotel Cala de Mar



Pozole from Teosintle

The Many Flavours of Ixtapa and Zihuatanejo

Two destinations where the mountains sparkle over the bay and culinary traditions float on woodsmoke

BY PAUL LILLAKAS

Mexican food is as much a colourful tapestry as the brightly-hued fabrics that adorn its restaurant and kitchen tables. Within this culture, woven tightly together by a united sense of pride in local ingredients and the diversity that each region has to offer, there are delicious surprises around every corner.

This spirit led me to spend a week exploring Ixtapa and Zihuatanejo, two neighbouring beach and fishing towns on the southern Pacific coast of Mexico separated by just four kilometers and bursting with distinct energy. Zihuatanejo, honoured as a Pueblo Mágico (magical town) for its cultural richness and natural beauty, promised authenticity and tradition—and it delivered.



Cooking with Chef Felipe



Chef Carmelita's Mole



Culinary Treasures

In Zihuatanejo, I entered Carmelita's, a charming open-air restaurant where you are greeted with the aroma of woodfire that embraces you like a grandmother's

hug, an appropriate precursor to meeting matriarch and owner Carmelita herself. While she jokes that her English isn't very good, she maintains that you don't need to speak the same language to communicate lovingly. She uses the universal language of a big smile, combined with the sharing of recipes and cooking techniques passed down from her ancestors.

Her fresh salsas, consisting of charred tomatoes, onions and chilis hand ground in a mortar and pestle, just wait to be drizzled over all kinds of dishes. Her house poblano mole sauce, bathing roasted chicken (or perhaps you'd prefer enchiladas) is a must-try that comes with a wink from the chef, showcasing how proud she is of the recipe. Refreshing and floral hibiscus punch (called hibiscus water) is poured all around to cool the heat of various spicy dishes. There is much more to enjoy at this restaurant than one visit can fit in! You simply must go back for more.

In the pursuit of even more regional delights, I found myself at restaurant Importados Nacionales by chef Felipe Meneses and owner Marianna Senties. Chef Felipe's menu is a joyous pursuit in preservation, literally. He uses brining, canning and fermentation techniques to transform humble vegetables, chilis and even fish into preserves. Exceptional bites included brine-aged cocinero fish, reminiscent of pickled herring, served with chipotle dulce (sweet chipotle pepper preserves) and an array of freshly baked breads. All of this done in a cozy space where every inch is used efficiently by the capable staff.

A trip to the region wouldn't be complete without a visit to Restaurante Teosintle for traditional pozole verde, a warm and hearty soup filled with hominy (white corn), chicken and/or pork and served with a variety of toppings like avocado, fresh lime and crispy chicharron (fried pork skin). This soup, steeped in working-class tradition, is best enjoyed with family and friends in the spirit of community. And then there was Kau Kan, a clifftop restaurant overlooking Zihuatanejo Bay. As night fell, the mountains glittered, "like a Christmas tree," one local told me. With that view, fresh clams, tartare and grilled fish tasted even more magical.



Marine-biologist Claudia Yacuta Castillo



Our captain prepares fresh sashimi

Stunning Sealife and Sustainability

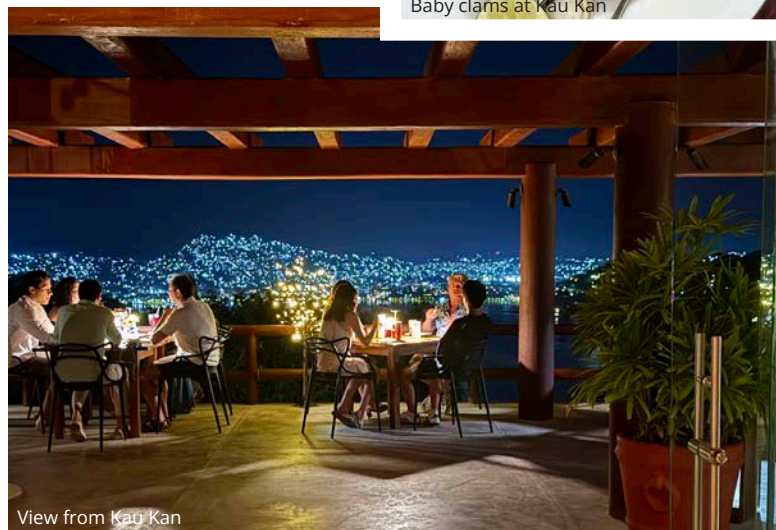
As with most coastal towns, Ixtapa and Zihuatanejo are teeming with the treasures of the sea, whether you're a fishing enthusiast, whale watcher, savvy snorkeller, or an all-around seafood lover. As I happen to fit all of the above, it was a real treat to participate in an early-morning fishing excursion guided by marine-biologist Claudia Yacuta Castillo. As we fished for plentiful skipjack tuna, Claudia excitedly educated us on local efforts aimed at seafood sustainability. This includes showcasing lesser used fish (such as skipjack) on restaurant menus to take the weight off overfished species like yellowfin. Though sometimes misguidedly called "garbage fish" by locals, an onboard filleting demonstration and preparation of sashimi and "tiritas" (thin strips of raw tuna marinated in lime juice, thinly sliced red onions, local sea salt and habanero chilis) proved that this fish is indeed a delicious alternative. There is nothing quite like fresh fish from the water to the plate in minutes.

A short trip away, Barra de Potosí revealed another side of the region. At sunrise, I glided by boat through mangroves, coffee and pastries in hand, spotting seabirds, leaping fish and even a crocodile. It was an eco-tour as calming as it was eye-opening.

For me, the perfect travel day pairs natural wonder with traditional bites, seasoned generously by local spirit. In Ixtapa and Zihuatanejo—"Zihua" to those who love it—you'll find all of this, with seconds and thirds gladly offered.



Baby clams at Kau Kan



View from Kau Kan



Sope filled with Pargo fish-prepared with Chef Oscar



Coconut shrimp at Cala de Mar



Shopping for catch of the day with Chef Oscar



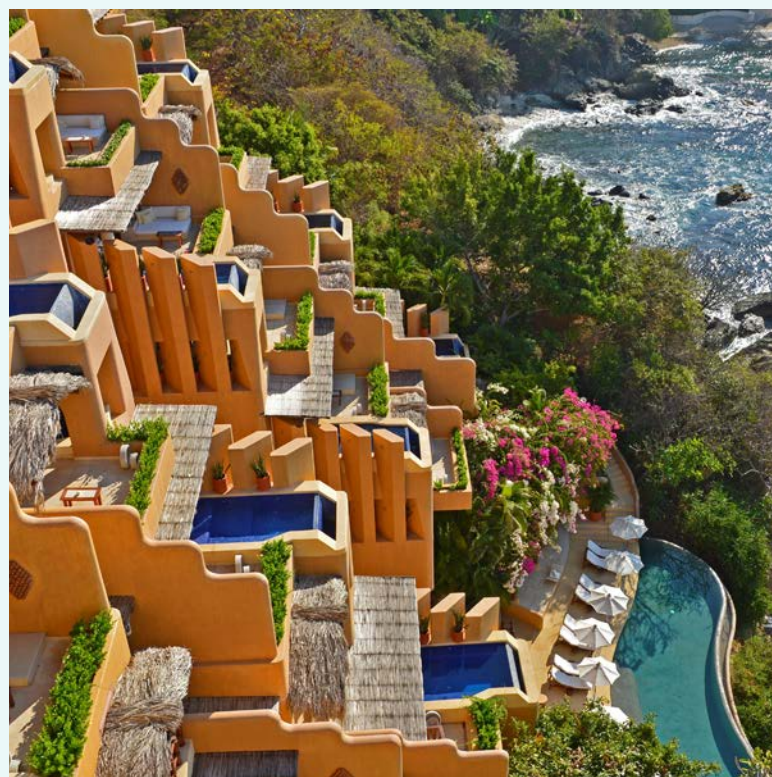
Cala de Mar-A hotel that leaves you speechless

I arrived at the hotel Cala de Mar Resort & Spa Ixtapa, a short 30-minute drive from Ixtapa-Zihuatanejo airport. Spacious and comfortable rooms open

to balconies with picturesque views of the blue water stretching to distant islands, waves quietly rolling in. If I've ever seen a honeymoon destination, this is it. The private plunge pool on the balcony made it extra special. The quality of service at this hotel warrants especially high marks, from the attentive and friendly staff to the quality of the food. The fabulous room service adds to the level of privacy one can enjoy here. The spa boasts massage service and hydrotherapy and can be found on the way down to the water's edge where you can hop on a swing and watch the waves crawl under your swinging feet!

During my stay at Cala de Mar I was invited to join chef Oscar for a unique culinary experience that is open to all guests—an early morning trip to the beach where fishermen lay out their catch-of-the-day for sale. This is followed by a trip to the farmer's market to gather local ingredients and then back to the hotel's restaurant terrace for a private cooking lesson. On that morning, we picked up a gorgeous bright red snapper the chef transformed into three dishes: a sope (pronounced soh-peh) topped with diced fish, tomatoes, onions and

chili; a flavourful fish soup and grilled filets topped with hibiscus glaze, guajillo chili sauce and fresh local herbs.





Cliffside room

This unforgettable hands-on experience wasn't just a lesson in cooking — it was the perfect finishing touch to the rich culinary treasures I had discovered in Ixtapa Zihuatanejo, leaving me inspired with a deeper appreciation for the flavours of this place.



Getting There

Direct flights are available in the winter season from Calgary and Vancouver with WestJet and Air Canada from Vancouver, Toronto and Montreal. Connecting flights are available from gateways across Canada, with year-round flights available via Mexico City with Aeromexico.

For trip inspiration:

ixtapazihuatanejo.travel

CaladeMar.com



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The Fives Hotels & Residences delivers a vacation experience designed to encompass every one of your senses

Some vacations are seen. Others are heard. But the most unforgettable ones are felt. Nestled along the stunning coastlines of Playa del Carmen and Puerto Morelos, The Fives Hotels & Residences invites travellers to rediscover the meaning of an all-inclusive vacation—through taste, sound, scent, touch and sight. It's not just about what's included, it's about how it makes you feel. Their signature All Senses Inclusive philosophy transforms each stay into a sensorial journey, inspired by Mexico, elevated with care and grounded in personal connection.

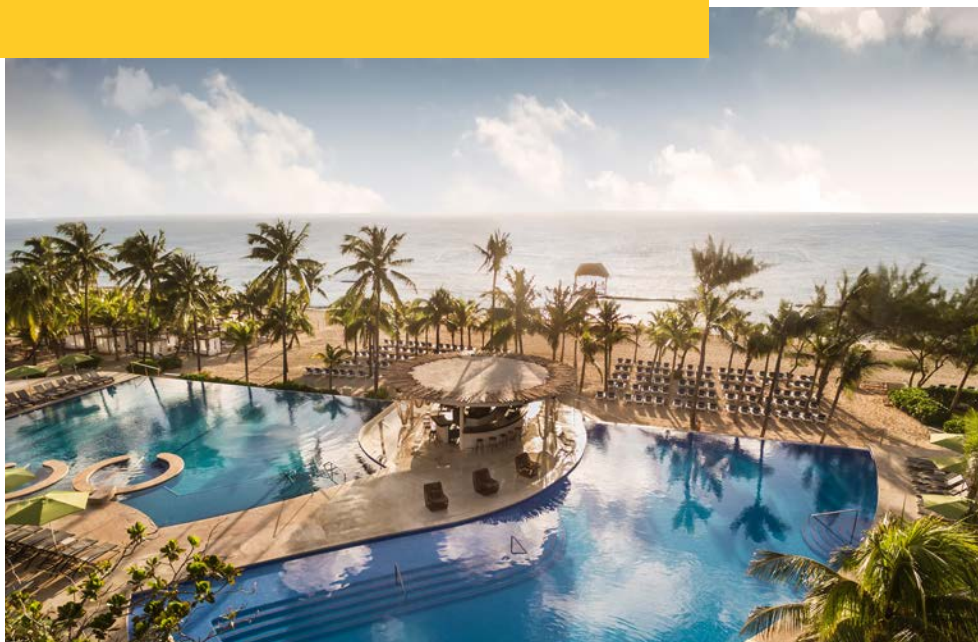
At the heart of this experience is a trio of principles that quietly guide everything: All Residence-Style Suites, Joy & Wellness and A La Carte All-Inclusive.



■ The Fives Beach Hotel & Residences

A short drive from downtown Playa del Carmen, this sprawling beachfront resort is a sanctuary designed for families, friends and multi-generational travellers. Here, vacation is about spaciousness and connection thanks to the property's signature residence-style suites with one to three bedrooms, full kitchens, living areas and private terraces.

You can swim in one of eight sparkling pools, play on various sports courts, or simply spend an afternoon indulging in global cuisine from any of the 14 à la carte restaurants and bars. From sushi to tacos, mezcal to mocktails, every meal becomes a stamp on a culinary passport. And when it's time to slow down, there are numerous ways to unwind. From beachside sound healing and hydrotherapy to an afternoon at The Spa by The Fives (or simply a nap under a palm tree), wellness is never forced; it's seamlessly woven into the flow of the day.



■ The Fives Oceanfront

Perched along the quiet shores of Puerto Morelos, this property offers a relaxed, bohemian vibe. With 93 all-suite accommodations, each stay is a retreat into relaxation, where the toughest decision of the day is between rooftop yoga or ceviche by the pool.

Here, the concept of à la carte isn't confined to the menu—it's a way of living. Every detail, like local ingredients, artisanal cocktails, or bespoke wellness rituals feels intentional. The slow pace and intimate atmosphere are big draws for many visitors and ideal for couples, creatives and nature seekers alike. Whether snorkelling the vibrant Mesoamerican reef or meditating in a sunrise ceremony, The Fives Oceanfront makes it easy to unplug and let your senses come alive.

■ The Beachfront by The Fives Hotels

Tucked along the tranquil shores of Xcalacoco Beach, this adults-only boutique resort is designed for anyone looking for intimacy, quiet luxury and an elegant space to create lasting memories. With just 43 suites this is a laidback escape, made even better by the presence of an on-site Ambassador, your personal host throughout your stay.

Here, it's all about enjoying yourself to the fullest, whether that means indulging in a deep-tissue massage, savouring fresh seafood by the water, or sipping a morning coffee on your oceanfront balcony. The vibe is romantic, refined and refreshingly unhurried. When you're in the mood for a change of scenery, hop on a free shuttle to sister hotel, The Fives Beach Hotel & Residences, which gives you access to even more amenities, including additional pools and restaurants.

Personalized service from start to finish

Before you even board a plane, The Fives is already working to bring your ideal vacation to life with the help of their E-Ambassadors—specialized travel advisors who assist you via phone, WhatsApp, or web chat to help plan your stay, answer questions and tailor your trip to your specific needs. And once you arrive, your Ambassador is there to welcome you and ensure that every moment of your vacation feels effortless.



■ The Fives Downtown Hotel & Residences – Curio Collection by Hilton

If your idea of a memorable getaway includes boutique design, rooftop cocktails and the pulse of a walkable city, this is the place for you. Right in the heart of Playa del Carmen, just steps from bustling Quinta Avenida, this 133-suite hideaway blends cosmopolitan charm with Caribbean ease.

Take in the city skyline from the infinity rooftop pool, sip an espresso from Marley Coffee in the morning and toast with local spirits at Cantina El Tigre by night. And when you need to recharge, residence-style suites become a private sanctuary, complete with kitchen, plush bed and elegant design details that cultivate a sense of

stylish comfort. Perfect for solo travellers, couples, or small groups, this property proves you can harness the eclectic energy of being downtown without having to sacrifice serenity.



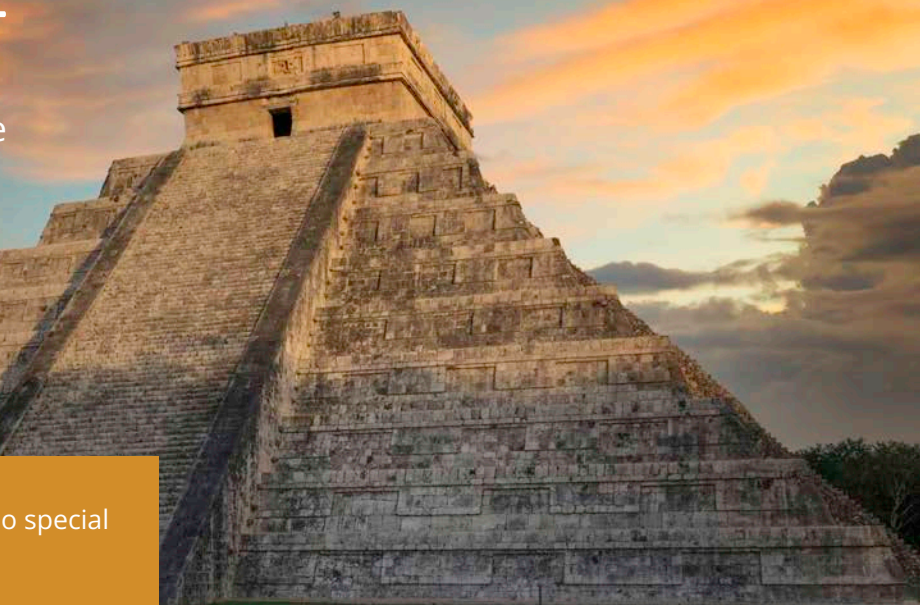
Visit [thefiveshotels.com](https://www.thefiveshotels.com) to start planning your sensorial escape.

THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO THE MANY SIDES OF YUCATÁN STATE

Yucatan is a living sanctuary where culture, gastronomy, wellness and nature converge

It's hard to capture what makes Mexico's Yucatán State so special because there are so many dimensions to explore. From ancient traditions and extraordinary flavours to holistic rituals and breathtaking landscapes, this multifaceted region of Mexico invites you to connect with what truly matters.

Here, every experience feels like stepping into a sanctuary—of history, of flavour, of wellness, of nature. This is not just a destination—it's a place of preservation and reconnection that keeps visitors returning again and again. Whether you're simply curious or actively planning a trip, here is everything you need to know about Yucatán.



Chichén Itzá

A PRIME LOCATION

Not to be confused with the Yucatán Peninsula as a whole, Yucatán is one of three states that make up the region. It's the heart of the peninsula with which it shares a name and lies between neighbouring Campeche and Quintana Roo, stretching north to the Gulf of Mexico.

Its capital, Mérida, is both a cultural hub and a gateway to archaeological sites like Uxmal, cenotes and nature reserves, making it the perfect jumping-off point for exploring the state. If you're planning a trip, WestJet flies direct from Toronto to Mérida three times weekly during the winter season with connecting flights from across Canada, making for a convenient route into the region. Yucatán also benefits from excellent connectivity. Besides Mérida International Airport, travellers can easily reach the state through the airports of Cancún and Tulum, opening up seamless access from both national and international destinations.

ALL-DAY ADVENTURE

Adventure is everywhere here. You'll find zipline circuits through the jungle, epic hikes and even world-class snorkelling and diving just a short trip away. Don't miss the chance to explore a cenote—natural sinkholes filled with crystal-clear water and considered sacred by the Maya (there are more than 3,000 in Yucatán). Guided tours often let you discover and swim in several in a single day.



Chuburná Puerto



Izamal



Uayma

HISTORY & CULTURE

Yucatán is a place of rich tradition and identity. With 18 Maya archaeological sites, it offers a journey through time, from the UNESCO-listed wonder of Chichén Itzá to the awe-inspiring Uxmal, whose Pyramid of the Magician and Governor's Palace highlight the sophistication of Maya architecture and astronomy.

The cultural richness continues in Valladolid, a colonial city where cobblestone streets, colourful buildings and cenotes like Zací make history tangible. Nearby Izamal, with its sun-soaked convent and ochre-hued homes, offers another perspective on Yucatán's living heritage.

Quick tip: Valladolid's Cenote Zací is right in the city centre making for a refreshing stop after sightseeing.



PHENOMENAL FOOD

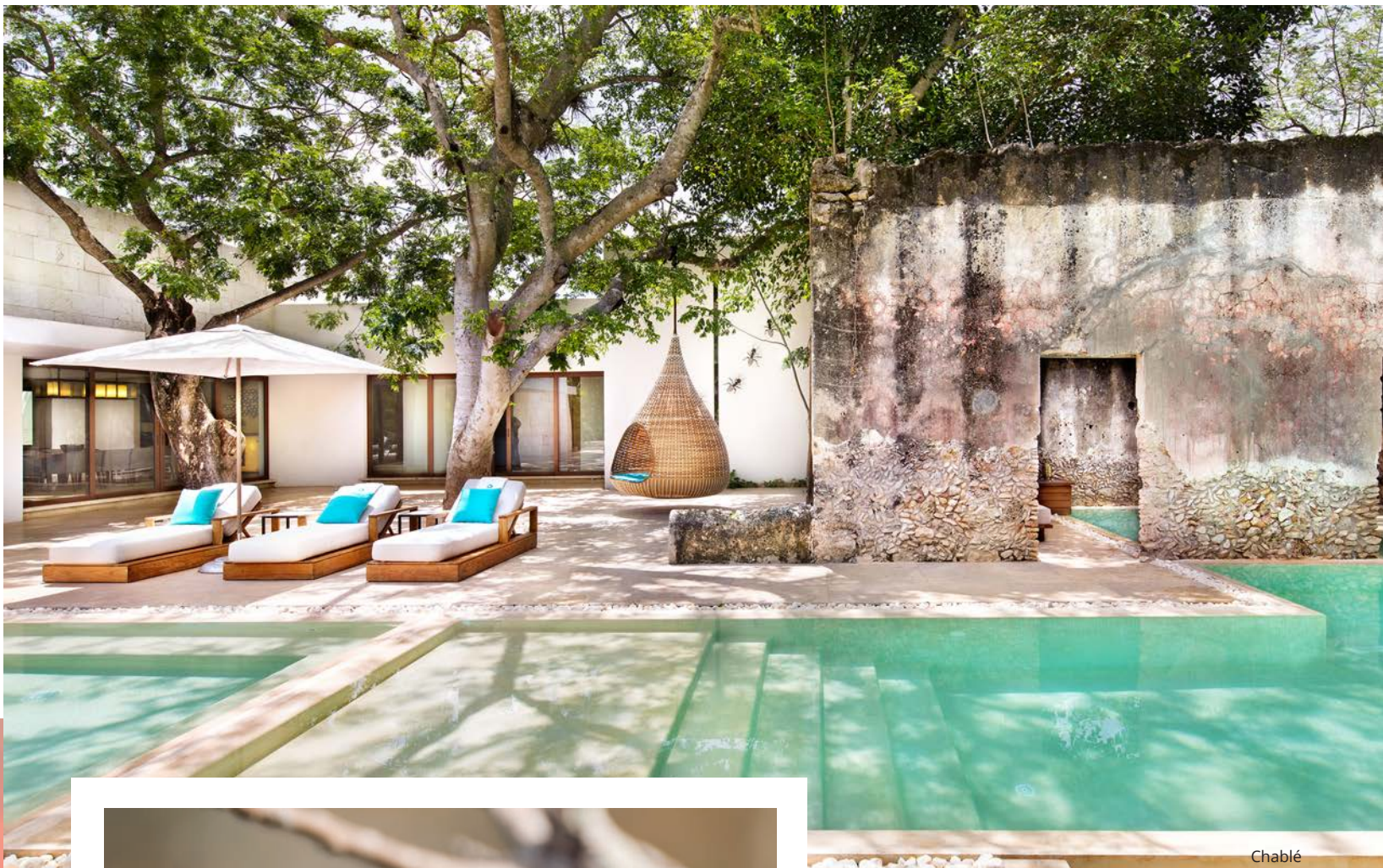
Yucatecan cuisine is a sanctuary of flavour, preserving ancient techniques while embracing new influences. Rooted in Maya tradition and enriched with European and Caribbean touches, it's a culinary heritage worth celebrating. Must-tries include cochinita pibil (slow-roasted pork with annatto), sopa de lima (a citrusy chicken soup) and papadzules (tortilla rolls with pumpkin seed sauce). Each bite tells the story of a culture that treats its flavours with a deep sense of pride.

ESCAPE INTO NATURE & WELLNESS

Nature here is as diverse as it is sacred. Yucatán's landscapes shift from lush jungle to tranquil mangroves, tropical forests and more than 300 kilometres of coastline. Celestún Biosphere Reserve is home to thousands of pink flamingos, while Ría Lagartos combines wetlands and salt flats with the chance of spotting turtles, pelicans and even crocodiles.

But Yucatán is also a wellness sanctuary. Visitors can experience traditional temazcal rituals, Mayan ceremonies, sound healing, cacao ceremonies and spa treatments that connect body, mind and spirit with the help of ancestral wisdom. It's the perfect place to restore balance while being surrounded by nature.





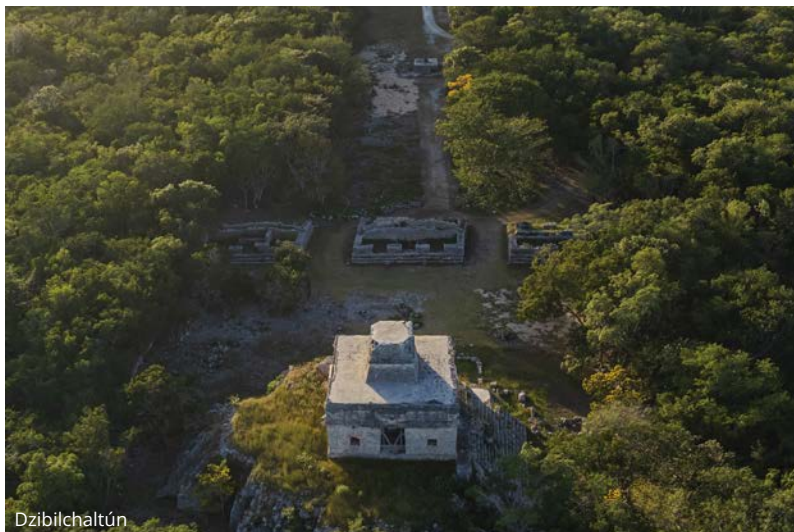
Chablé



UNIQUE ACCOMMODATIONS

Staying in Yucatán can be an experience in itself. Many historic haciendas, dating back to the 17th and 18th centuries, have been transformed into boutique hotels with elegant rooms, fine dining and lush gardens. For something different, luxury glamping at sites like Hameki in Homún offers outdoor movie nights, ziplines, cenote tours and wellness rituals under the stars.

The essence of Yucatán lies in its many sanctuaries—those of culture, gastronomy, wellness and nature. From the majesty of Uxmal to the charm of Valladolid, every visit is an invitation to celebrate and connect with a uniquely special area of Mexico.



Dzibilchaltún



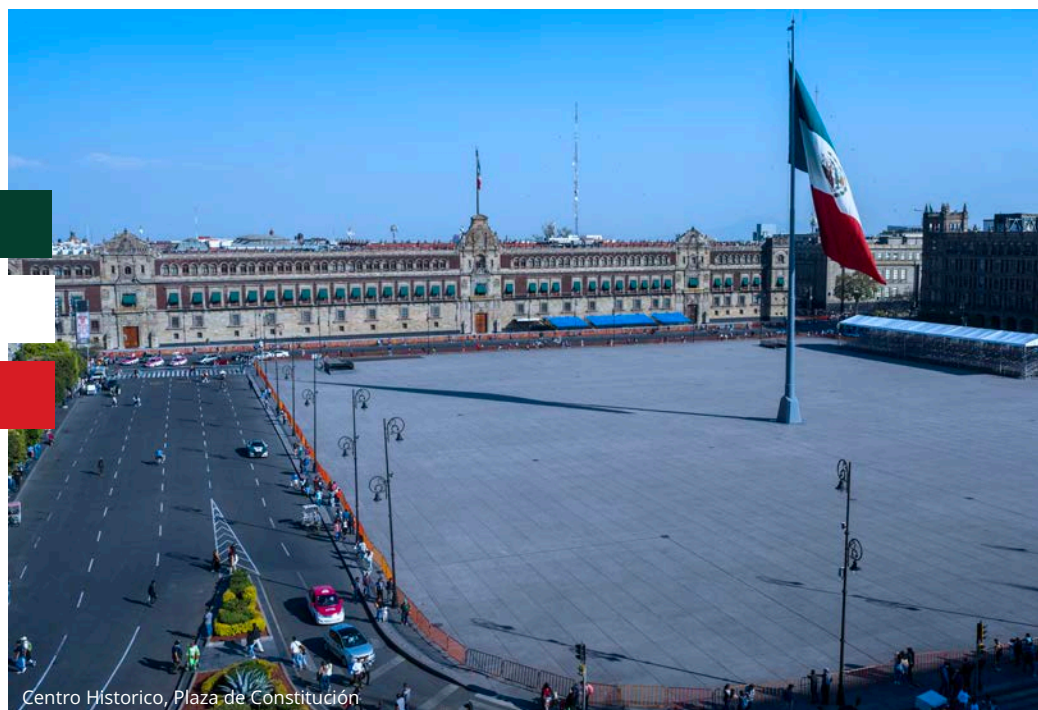
Mayan Sanctuary

yucatan.travel

How to Make the Most of a Mexico City Layover

Even if you only have a few days to explore this beautiful city, there are a few ways to maximize your time and enhance your experience

BY MARK STEVENS



Centro Histórico, Plaza de Constitución

When my wife and I planned a recent visit to Mexico's Puerto Escondido we faced a dilemma.

There were no direct flights so it was either a long layover in Mexico City's airport or Plan B: extend that layover to three days and do some exploring. We chose Plan B and we're glad we did.

Mexico City is a city of more than nine million so we knew that seeing it in such a short time would be nearly impossible. But by staying focused and planning carefully we managed to get a sufficient sample of the allure of this city to make our adventure worth it. And it sure beat four hours in the departure lounge.

■ STAY FOCUSED

Because we were on a tight timeline, we chose a central base of operations and mostly limited ourselves to activities within walking distance. Centro Histórico seemed an ideal choice. The Plaza de Constitución, a massive square surrounded by both the National Palace and the historic Metropolitan Cathedral, dominates the neighbourhood. Add in the nearby Templo Mayor and a wealth of dining options, and we knew we'd made the right decision for where to base ourselves.

Dining-wise we enjoyed a restaurant called Balcón de Zócalo so much we visited more than once. Bird's-eye views of that imposing square (zócalo means square in Spanish), guacamole made tableside and excellent margaritas sealed the deal. For lunch one day we went with La Terraza at the Gran Hotel, an outdoor oasis featuring equally panoramic views of the square.

■ SAMPLE SOME ART

Carved statues bordered by massive columns dominate the façade of beautiful Palacio de Bellas Artes (Palace of Fine Arts). Part museum and part performance space, this historical building is home to



Palacio de Bellas Artes

some fantastic murals, including a few by acclaimed muralist Diego Rivera. One of his pieces here is 12 metres long and 6 metres high, occupying a marble atrium it shares with modern sculptures.

Back in Plaza de Constitución be sure to visit the National Palace with its own share of powerful murals, in particular Rivera's "History of Mexico." Or stick to the streets. We strolled past a wealth of buildings boasting façades festooned with carvings and tiled mosaics and rested on park benches that doubled as sculptures. Though we were determined not to break our own "walkability" rule you're allowed to if you're passionate about art. The Frida Kahlo Museum, further afield, is a must-do for its comprehensive look into the artist's life.

■ DIVE INTO HISTORY

Centro Histórico is a logical starting point if you want to dive into history. Given my love of church architecture a visit to the Metropolitan Cathedral was a must-do. Construction began in 1573 on top of

also meant that a stop at the Templo Mayor Museum was also non-negotiable. I allotted two hours to the site given my time constraints, but three hours in I'd only just strolled the expansive ruins outside and had hardly begun my exploration of the extensive galleries. All the more reason to plan a return visit.

■ VISIT A MARKET

Having shopped for olives in the many markets of Athens and schlepped for souvenirs in the souks of Marrakesh, I'm convinced that the fastest way to get the pulse of a city is to visit the local market. In our case, the city's main market was walkable from our pied-à-terre. Inside the high-ceilinged structure boasting huge windows we noticed a carnicería (butcher) beside an altar hosting the ceramic statues of two saints. Next door, a clothing vendor.



the ruins of part of an Aztec temple. It is the biggest and oldest cathedral in Latin America. It's visually awe-inspiring, from the twin towers and ornate sky-reaching domes to the fourteen chapels occupying the main sanctuary. My love for history

Then it was locals doing lunch; tucking into tostadas, tacos and tamales. It was all a treat for the tastebuds, a lesson in culture and one more highlight of our Mexico City layover.

FORKS UP IN MEXICO CITY

MAD FOR MEXICO
MEXICO CITY

Casa Imperial and Taqueria El Califa de León each represent a part of what makes Mexico City a must-visit culinary destination

Mexico City's food scene is as bold and diverse as the city itself, offering experiences that range from fine dining to humble food carts to everything in between. Casa Imperial and Taqueria El Califa de León are just two spots that highlight the city's wide spectrum of flavours and culinary traditions

CASA IMPERIAL

If you're looking for a fine dining experience rooted in Mexican tradition, Casa Imperial is an excellent place to start. Located in Polanco, one of Mexico City's most elegant neighbourhoods, this is a restaurant serving dishes deeply connected to history. From the moment you step inside, it's clear the restaurant is focused on honouring Mexico's culinary traditions as well as creating a space where local ingredients are meant to be celebrated.

With sprawling Parque Lincoln just a short walk away and Avenida Masaryk (lined with luxury boutiques) around the corner, Casa Imperial fits right into the neighbourhood's blend of

sophistication and charm. The menu spans from breakfast to dinner, highlighting recipes passed down through generations. Each menu item tells a story and every bite feels like a part of Mexico's culinary history.

Dishes range from flavourful tacos made with

handcrafted tortillas to more substantial plates like charcoal grilled ribeye with a cheese-stuffed chile güero, mole poblano with chicken, and salmon wrapped in hoja santa (a local herb) and bathed in green sauce. You'll also find a fun selection of small plates and snacks to share like guacamole and tuna tostadas.

While on assignment, chef Paul Lillakas had the opportunity to check out Casa Imperial and here are a few of his takeaways:

- The poblano soup was delicious, rich, vibrantly green and enhanced with cubes of creamy panela cheese.
- The décor is warm and welcoming with a beautiful bar and relaxed open-air atmosphere.
- Service was very prompt and friendly and though no English was spoken, it added to the authenticity. After all, isn't that what Google Translate is for?
- With the charm of a time gone by, a variety of treats are offered from a dessert cart once you're ready to order something sweet.

@casaimperialmx

TAQUERIA EL CALIFA DE LEÓN

This iconic taco joint represents a total change of pace and definitely should not be missed if you're visiting Mexico City. Its claim to fame? Being the world's first taco stand to receive a Michelin star.

Opened in 1968 by Juan Hernández González, this humble establishment is still family-run. The name itself is a nod to legendary bullfighter Rodolfo Gaona, known as "El Califa de León." Anything but fancy, it has just a small counter inside and no formal seating. Customers often stand or find a borrowed table outside to enjoy their selection from a menu of only four tacos.

The taco that gained international recognition is called the Gaonera, featuring thinly sliced beef cooked to order and only seasoned with salt and a squeeze of lime. According to the Michelin review, the taste is "elemental and pure." Served in freshly pressed corn tortillas, it's a simple dish prepared in a way that lets the ingredients shine. Since earning its star, the lines have been growing, yet the experience remains as unfussy and straightforward as ever. @califadeleon

Casa Imperial and Taqueria El Califa de León showcase two very different sides of Mexico City's bold culinary scene, each in a way that highlights just how deep Mexico City's culinary roots run.



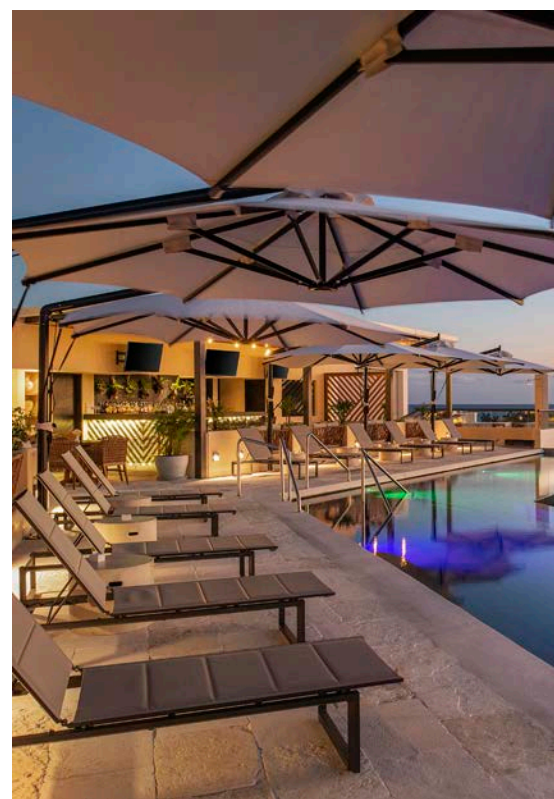
DISCOVER THE BEST OF RIVIERA MAYA WITH EL CID RESORTS

In Riviera Maya, staying with El Cid Resorts means personalized service combined with the perks of three connected properties

Riviera Maya is one of Mexico's most versatile destinations, with long stretches of shoreline, Mayan archeological sites to explore, cenotes to swim in and tropical forests all within easy reach. El Cid Resorts have three properties here, each with its own character, and all linked through a convenient program that lets guests move easily between them to enjoy the best of all three. The result is lots of choice without complication or compromise.

● Hotel Marina El Cid Spa & Beach Resort

Hotel Marina El Cid Spa & Beach Resort is built for variety. Families and groups gravitate to the 22,000-square-foot pool where waterfalls, slides, sun deck, in-water lounge chairs, children's area and a swim-up bar mean everyone has room to spread out. The beachfront location makes it easy to alternate between the pool and the sea, while the full-service marina is a gateway to snorkelling, sailing or deep-sea fishing excursions. When you're not in the pool or hitting the beach, sprawling El Cocay Spa features unique treatments inspired by Mayan traditions in a tranquil setting.



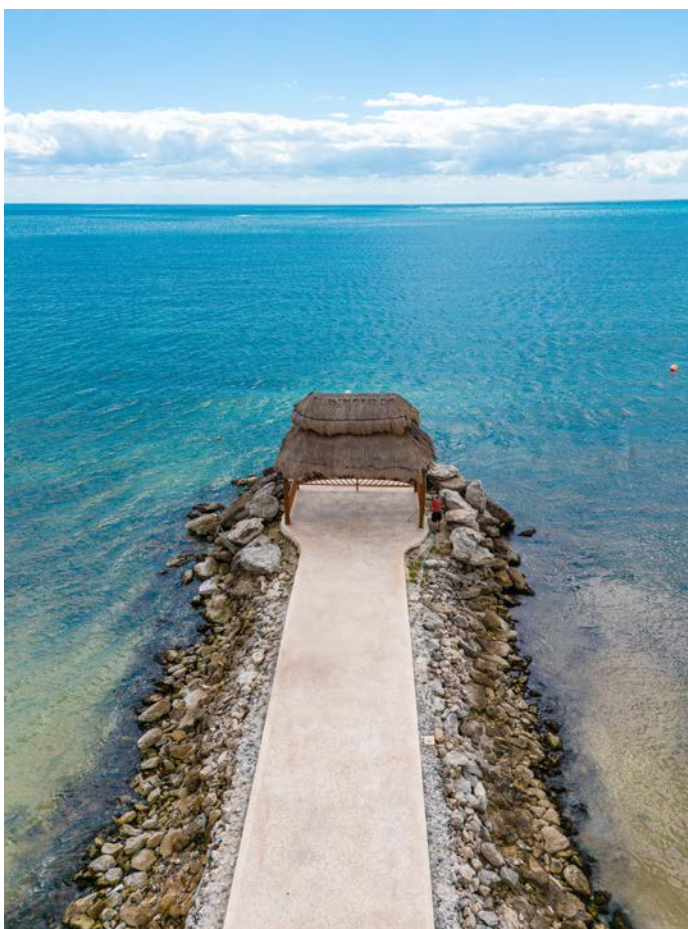


● Ventus at Marina El Cid Spa & Beach Resort

Ventus at Marina El Cid Spa & Beach Resort has a contemporary feel that easily blends comfort and style. Suites are modern and spacious, with large balconies overlooking the water or gardens. Some suites come with a private Jacuzzi or in-room soaker tub, or you can opt for a swim-up suite giving you direct access to the pool right from your terrace. Once you check in, your first stop will likely be the expansive infinity pool, designed to look as if its edge is merging with the ocean. Two Jacuzzis flank the pool and all three overlook a beautiful stretch of white sand dotted with palapas for shade and hammocks for lounging.

● Ventus Ha' at Marina El Cid Spa & Beach Resort

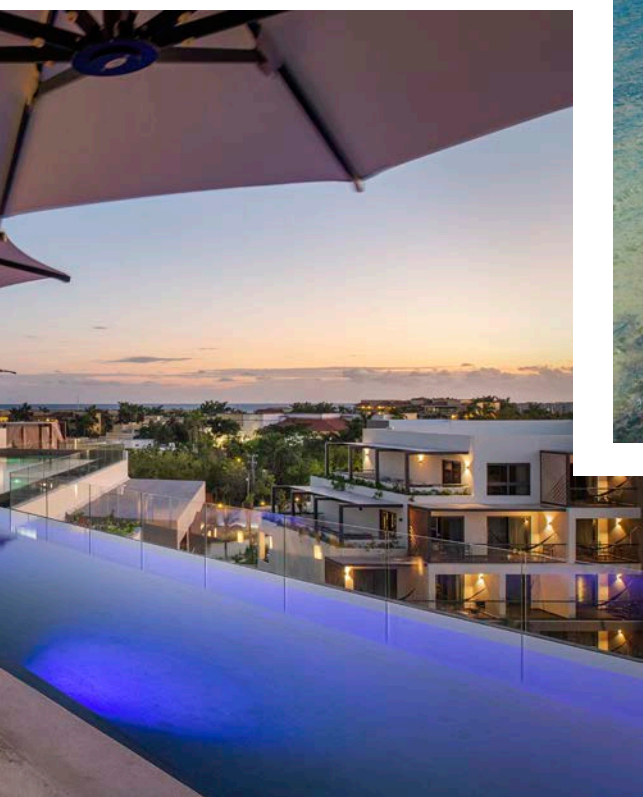
The newest of the three El Cid Resorts, Ventus Ha' at Marina El Cid Spa & Beach Resort, is smaller and distinctly serene. Its boutique-style suites and thoughtful design inspired by the region's many cenotes make it an ideal choice for couples or travellers who prefer calm. Don't miss the adults-only rooftop pool bars, Rûf and Na.Ha., where sunset views of the Caribbean and craft cocktails are the main attractions. While Ventus Ha' at Marina El Cid Spa & Beach Resort emphasizes relaxation, there are enough activities on offer for anyone in the mood for a bit more excitement.



The Perks of Privilege

One of the best parts of staying with El Cid Resorts in Riviera Maya is flexibility. Through the Exchange Privilege program you aren't limited to the offerings of just one property, you can make use of the amenities across the entire El Cid Resorts Riviera Maya complex. This gives you access

to over 31 restaurants and bars, multiple pools—including infinity and adults-only pools—coffee shops, brand new pickleball courts, daily activities programs, Jacuzzis and more, all available regardless of which resort serves as your home base. It's a simple way to expand your experience without extra planning.



Día de Muertos Comes Alive at *Fairmont Mayakoba*

Fairmont Mayakoba brings Mexico's treasured holiday to life with food, festivities and family-friendly fun.

Whether you're familiar with Mexico's Day of the Dead festivities or have never had the chance to participate, a renowned resort is providing a fantastic opportunity to immerse yourself in the beloved holiday. Fairmont Mayakoba, located along Mexico's Riviera Maya, offers a distinctive way to experience one of the country's most cherished traditions.

From October 31 to November 2 guests have the chance to engage with Día de Muertos, a celebration that joyfully honours the memory of loved ones, through unique experiences that blend culture, cuisine and the peaceful natural surroundings of the resort.





A Día de Muertos Party on October 31 kicks things off in style with vibrant décor, traditional music and folkloric performances. A Día de Muertos boat tour running throughout the weekend will take you through illuminated canals and mangroves where floating altars and live performances create a spiritual and unforgettable experience. The Haunted Soirée at Cielo Rooftop on October 31 is an exclusive adults-only event featuring lively DJ sets and craft cocktails under the stars.

Also throughout the weekend, a communal altar adorned with marigolds, sugar skulls and photos of loved ones will invite guests to pause, reflect and connect with the true meaning of Día de Muertos and everything that makes it so special.

When it comes to food, culinary offerings are sure to be a highlight of the weekend. At La Laguna, chefs will put together a special menu that reimagines classic Yucatán dishes, including mole negro, cochinita pibil, charred octopus with tamarind glaze and cacao-inspired desserts, all accompanied by mezcal-focused cocktails.

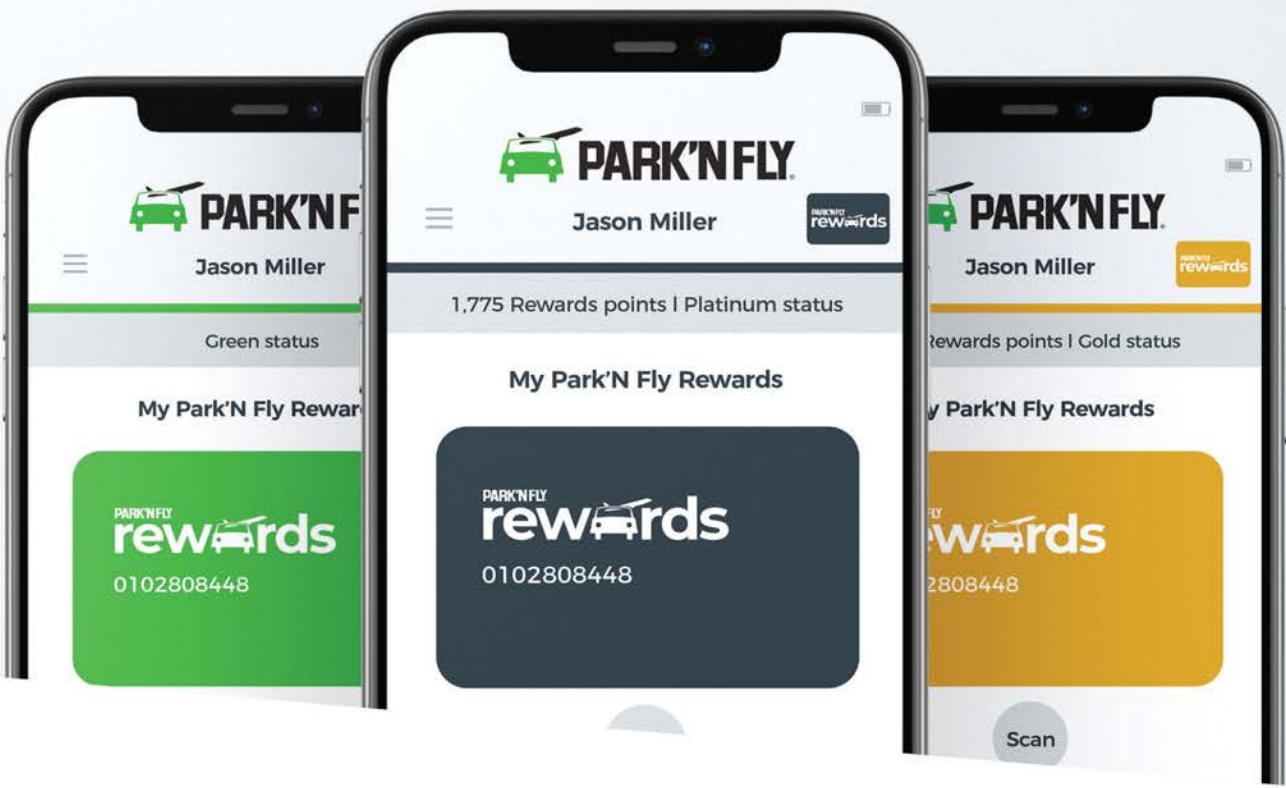
Children get several of their own fun ways to celebrate and learn more about Día de Muertos. The resort's acclaimed Balam and Coatí Kids' Clubs will host creative activities for the holiday, including Catrina parades, floral crown making, skull pillow crafts and more. There will also be a Catrina & Catrín makeup station on November 2 kids are sure to love.



Fairmont Mayakoba itself is a draw beyond the festivities. With 401 rooms set across 45 acres of mangroves and waterways, the resort combines open, airy design with luxury amenities. Guests can enjoy the spa, pools and a range of dining options, all while remaining close to Riviera Maya's white sand beaches.

If you're looking for a holiday experience that blends cultural immersion and local traditions with comfort and style, Día de Muertos at Fairmont Mayakoba gives you the chance to do just that.

[fairmont-mayakoba.com](https://www.fairmont-mayakoba.com)
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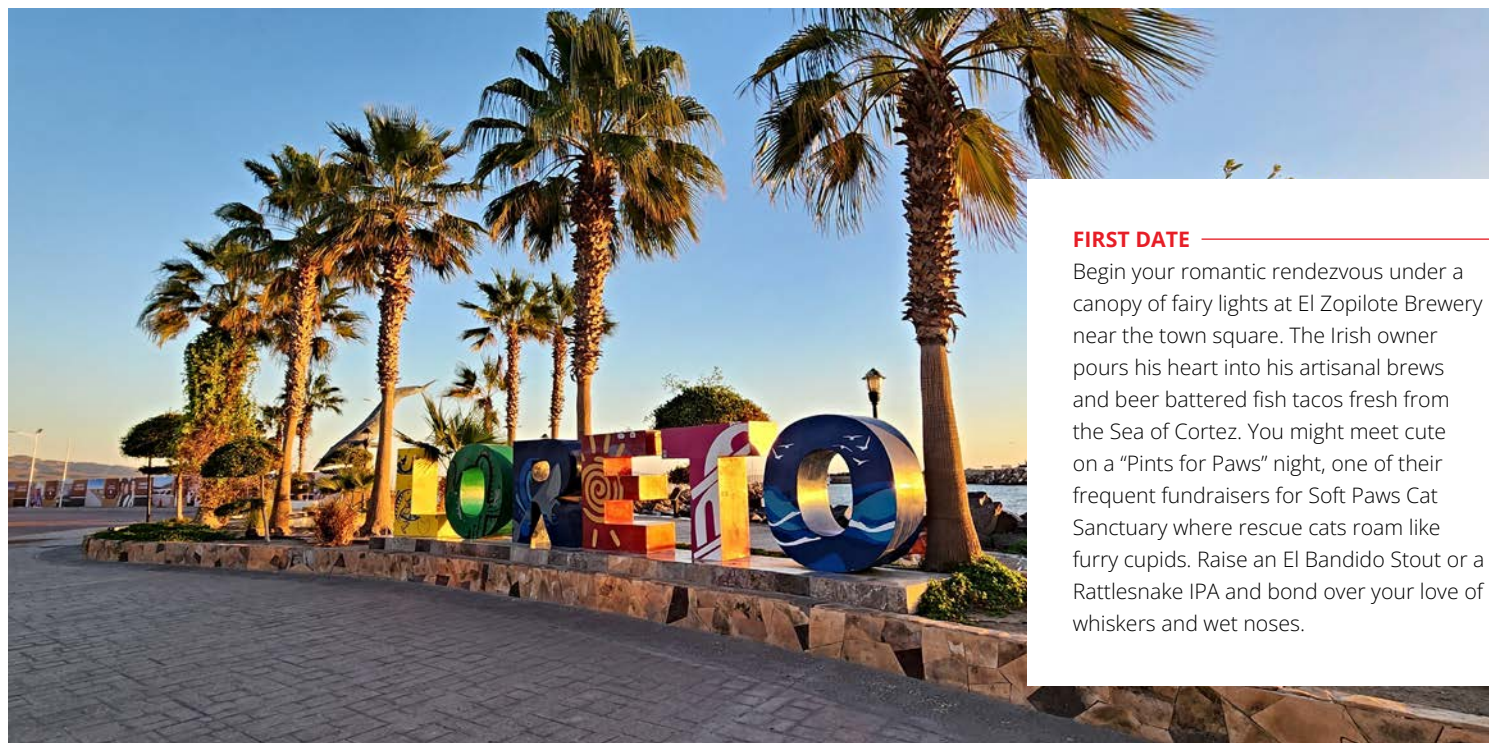
Brews under the stars at El Zopilote Brewing Co

LOVING LORETO

This scenic slice of Baja California Sur was made for romance

BY DEBRA SMITH

Have you met Loreto? This lovely corner of Baja California Sur sits like a button on an evening glove, gracing the slender arm of Baja California's peninsula. This is one of Mexico's Magic Towns, a Pueblo Magico. It's a place where anything can happen, if you want it to. Say hello to romantic Loreto where hearts open and time slows down



FIRST DATE

Begin your romantic rendezvous under a canopy of fairy lights at El Zopilote Brewery near the town square. The Irish owner pours his heart into his artisanal brews and beer battered fish tacos fresh from the Sea of Cortez. You might meet cute on a "Pints for Paws" night, one of their frequent fundraisers for Soft Paws Cat Sanctuary where rescue cats roam like furry cupids. Raise an El Bandido Stout or a Rattlesnake IPA and bond over your love of whiskers and wet noses.



Sipping margarita's at Claudia's

BUY A RING MAYBE?

You'll find glass ornaments, pretty sunhats and fun luchador wrestling masks at Plaza Julieta and handmade silver jewelry at Quetzalli Art Studio. A ring can be a wonderful souvenir, or it might be a promise for the future. Pick up a brightly painted wooden carving called an alebrije for luck at Plaza Mission Loreto.

As afternoon shadows appear, drop into Las Flores Spa & Boutique for a couples massage. Their organic

massage and body treatment products will soothe you with scents of cactus, aloe vera and prickly pear. The location is perfect. Across the charming central plaza, City Hall glows buttercup yellow at sundown and Claudia's Margaritas restaurant is waiting next door. Sip a chilled rice milk horchata or a frosty margarita at a candy-coloured outdoor table under the sign that says "Loreto Mi Amor."



Hearts open in Loreto

COMMITMENT ISSUES

Wondering how to take your trip to the next level? Here's where Loreto really shines. Hike hand in hand on the Tabor Canyon Trail, a 1.3 kilometre route that ends in hidden pools and waterfalls. Or meet local guide Mario Perez and his family in nearby Ligui and canter along a sandy beach on horseback while Mario introduces you to the landscape he knows so well.

Join Sea and Land Tours for a half day hike to see La Pinguica cave paintings and pictographs created by ancient nomadic tribes. Experienced guide Juve Orozco will help you imagine the site as it appeared to people just like you, centuries ago.

Or stay in town and stroll along Juan Maria de Salvatierra, the town's historic walking street, shaded by a canopy of trees. Visit The Mission of Our Lady of Loreto, the very first mission in Baja California Sur, built in 1697. The bells still ring out for weddings, mass and other celebrations.



A glimpse of the terrace and courtyard at Posada Del Cortes

HONEYMOON PHASE

No trip to Loreto would be complete without time on the water. The Bay of Loreto National Park, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, is a sanctuary caressed by the calm, warm waters of the Gulf of California. Seals, dolphins and sea lions make their home here along with marine turtles, hundreds of species of fish and the famous blue footed boobies. Rent a kayak or sail with ABT Sailing to one of five nearby uninhabited islands for a day of boating, snorkelling and sunshine. Share a picnic lunch at Honeymoon Cove on Isla Danzante, slip into the waves to explore the Agustin Melgar shipwreck, then watch the sunset turn Elephant Rock a dazzling gold at Isla Santa Catalina. You may never want to say goodbye to magical Loreto.

HAPPILY EVER AFTER

For a romantic stay, consider the enchanting Hotel Posada del Cortes. The rooms at this classic Spanish style boutique hotel have creamy hand plastered walls, dark oak furnishings and comfortable beds piled high with pillows. Vines cover the walls of the cobblestone courtyard and wind their way up a delicate wrought iron staircase to a breezy third floor terrace perfect for stargazing and midnight confessions.



Loreto's shopping street



Photo by @lovephotos.ca

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