



# Cancún, Cozumel & the Yucatán



THIS EDITION WRITTEN AND RESEARCHED BY

**John Hecht, Sandra Bao**

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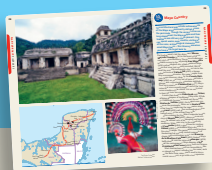
# 4 easy-to-use sections

## PLAN YOUR TRIP

### Your planning tool kit

Photos & suggestions to help you create the perfect trip.

1

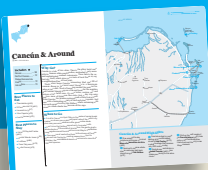


## ON THE ROAD

### Your complete guide

Expert reviews, easy-to-use maps and insider tips.

2



## UNDERSTAND

### Get more from your trip

Learn about the big picture, to make sense of what you see.

3

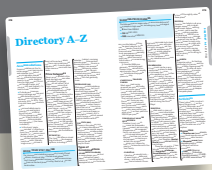


## SURVIVAL GUIDE

### Your at-a-glance reference

Vital practical information for a smooth trip.

4



## How to Use This Book

Look for these symbols to quickly identify listings:

- |                    |                         |
|--------------------|-------------------------|
| Sights             | Sleeping                |
| Beaches            | Eating                  |
| Activities         | Drinking                |
| Courses            | Entertainment           |
| Tours              | Shopping                |
| Festivals & Events | Information & Transport |

**All reviews** are ordered in our authors' preference, starting with their most preferred option. Additionally:

**Sights** are arranged in the geographic order that we suggest you visit them and, within this order, by author preference.

**Eating and Sleeping reviews** are ordered by price range (budget, midrange, top end) and, within these ranges, by author preference.

These symbols give vital information for each listing:

- Must-visit recommendation
- Sustainable or green recommendation

**FREE** No payment required

- |                      |                       |
|----------------------|-----------------------|
| Telephone number     | English-language menu |
| Opening hours        | Family-friendly       |
| Parking              | Pet-friendly          |
| Nonsmoking           | Bus                   |
| Air-conditioning     | Ferry                 |
| Internet access      | Tram                  |
| Wi-fi access         | Train                 |
| Swimming pool        |                       |
| Vegetarian selection |                       |

For symbols used on maps, see the Map Legend.

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# On the Road



# Cancún, Cozumel & the Yucatán





### Isla Holbox

Swim with gigantic whale sharks (p71)

### Isla Contoy

A nature buff's paradise (p70)

### Isla Mujeres

Low-key island living (p75)

### Cancún

Resort glitz meets Caribbean blue (p54)

### Isla Cozumel

Mexico's top diving destination (p84)

### Playa del Carmen

The Yucatán's hippest beach city (p102)

### Tulum

Jaw-dropping oceanfront Maya ruins (p113)

### Cobá

Bike at a Maya jungle site (p120)

### Chichén Itzá

World-famous Maya wonder (p177)

### Laguna Bacalar

Snorkel in an azure lake (p132)



## OUR STORY

A beat-up old car, a few dollars in the pocket and a sense of adventure. In 1972 that's all Tony and Maureen Wheeler needed for the trip of a lifetime – across Europe and Asia overland to Australia. It took several months, and at the end – broke but inspired – they sat at their kitchen table writing and stapling together their first travel guide, *Across Asia on the Cheap*. Within a week they'd sold 1500 copies. Lonely Planet was born.

Today, Lonely Planet has offices in Melbourne, London and Oakland, with more than 600 staff and writers. We share Tony's belief that 'a great guidebook should do three things: inform, educate and amuse'.

## OUR WRITERS



### John Hecht

**Coordinating author:** *Plan Your Trip, Cancún & Around, Isla Mujeres, Isla Cozumel, Riviera Maya, Costa Maya & the Southern Caribbean Coast, Yucatán State & the Maya Heartland, Understand Cancún, Cozumel & Yucatán (except Yucatán Cuisine), Survival Guide*

John headed down Mexico way more than two decades ago and, much to mom's disappointment, he's still there. He spent the early years in Guadalajara, studying Spanish and practicing his new language skills in the neighborhood *cantinas*. Several years later he bid farewell to the mariachi capital to take a reporting job at an English-language newspaper in Mexico City. Next he turned freelance and one of his first gigs was a travel writing assignment in the Yucatán. He has now done several jobs in and around Cancún, including a series of short videos shot for Lonely Planet TV. Additionally, he has written for two editions of the Lonely Planet Mexico guide and he co-authored *Puerto Vallarta & Pacific Mexico*.

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### Sandra Bao

**Campeche, Chiapas** Sandra is a Chinese-American born in Argentina who has traveled to nearly 60 countries on six continents. In 1990, while on vacation, she drove to Mexico with her future husband Ben Greensfelder and fell in love with the country; nine years later she scored her first guidebook-writing gig for Lonely Planet, researching Chiapas. Since then she's travelled all around Mexico and especially Yucatán, and is constantly amazed by the wonders this beautiful region has to offer. Over the last 12 years Sandra has contributed to a few dozen Lonely Planet titles to countries like Argentina, Venezuela, Mexico and the USA.

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## Plan Your Trip

# Itineraries



**1**  
WEEK

### Cancún & the Riviera Maya

The road from Cancún to Cobá is chock full of coast-hugging surprises. Along the way you'll find fun-filled cenotes (limestone sinkholes), astonishing Maya ruins and happening little beach towns with sugar-white sands.

Get things started with a dip in the sapphire waters along the Zona Hotelera (hotel zone) of **Cancún** (p56), then hit downtown and see the other side of the city over dinner and dancing.

Make your way south about 30km and stop in **Puerto Morelos** (p99) to duck out

to the beach, then browse for handmade crafts in the small town's artisans market. Spend a day or so beach-bumming and dining in uberchic **Playa del Carmen** (p102). Playa, as it's called, is a good jumping-off point for **Isla Cozumel** (p84), where you'll enjoy amazing diving and snorkeling, quiet beaches on the island's windswept side and a pleasant town plaza. If you've brought kids, head back to the mainland and visit one of the theme parks just south of Playa, such as **Xplor** (p102) with its underground river-raft rides.

You'll definitely want to visit Maya ruins and it's hard to imagine a more



El Castillo, Tulum

spectacular location than **Tulum** (p113), where structures are perched atop a cliff overlooking the Mexican Caribbean. While at the site, take the stairs down to the beach and have a refreshing swim to cool off. Tulum's town and its coastal Zona Hotelera are destinations in their own right. Stay in a bungalow on the sand and at night paint the town red along the buzzing main strip.

With an early start, head for the Maya ruins of **Cobá** (p120; find the road to Cobá

at Tulum's north end). Once inside this archaeological site, rent a bicycle and marvel at jungle ruins connected by ancient paths. Before heading back to Tulum, have lunch at one of Cobá's lakeside restaurants. On the return, drop by the **Gran Cenote** (p120) for a little swimming and snorkeling action.

This easy 170km trip stays close to Cancún and there's frequent bus service to all of these destinations, or just rent a car.





10  
DAYS

## Maya Country



PHILIPPE COLONINI / GETTY IMAGES ©

The architectural and artistic achievements of the Maya are prominently dotted across the peninsula. Though the ancient cities are long abandoned, the Maya people and their traditions are still very much present. One can spend weeks, even months, visiting all of the ruins, archaeological museums and small Maya towns – this itinerary assumes you have a life to get back to.

For background, visit the shiny new **Museo Maya de Cancún** (p56) in the heart of the resort city's Zona Hotelera. The price of admission includes access to the adjoining **San Miguelito** (p56) archaeological site, which features Maya ruins that were just recently unveiled. Hit the road the next day and spend a day or two in the colonial town of **Valladolid** (p184), a former Maya ceremonial center. For some respite from your Maya itinerary, drop by the **Cenote Dzit-nup** (p186) on your way out of town and take a plunge into a spectacular limestone sinkhole. Next up is must-see **Chichén Itzá** (p177), Maya ruins that were recently named one of the 'new seven wonders of the world.' Get an early start to beat the tour bus crowds.

A route then leads to **Oxkutzcab** and **Tekax**, offering glimpses of traditional Maya life. While in Oxkutzcab, be sure to check out the nearby **Grutas de Loltún** (p164), the largest cave system on the peninsula. Move on to **Santa Elena**, a fine base for exploring the impressive ruins of **Uxmal** (p159) and other archaeological sites tucked away in the rolling Puuc hills.

After crossing the Yucatán-Campeche border, stop at **Hopelchén** (p207), where you can witness the ancient arts of beekeeping and herbal medicine. Make your way to the walled city of **Campeche** (p196), a good base for visiting **Edzná** (p209), a formidable Maya site with a five-story temple. The peninsula's south harbors fascinating but scarcely visited remnants of classic Maya civilization in the vast **Reserva de la Biosfera Calakmul** (p215). Serious Maya buffs should visit the ruins of **Palenque** (p234) and the contemporary Maya domain of **San Cristóbal de las Casas** (p223), both in Chiapas.

Most destinations here are accessible by bus or shared transport vehicles, but for some, such as the Ruta Puuc ruins, you'll need to hire a rental car or taxi, or go with a tour operator.



COSMO CONDOMA / GETTY IMAGES ©

Top: Ruins, Palenque  
Bottom: Folkloric dancers



# Off the Beaten Track: Cancún, Cozumel & the Yucatán

## SAN CRISANTO

Palm groves; quiet, white-sand beaches; a few rustic cabins; and a pace so slow that *mañana* never comes – the ultimate escapist's retreat. (p175)

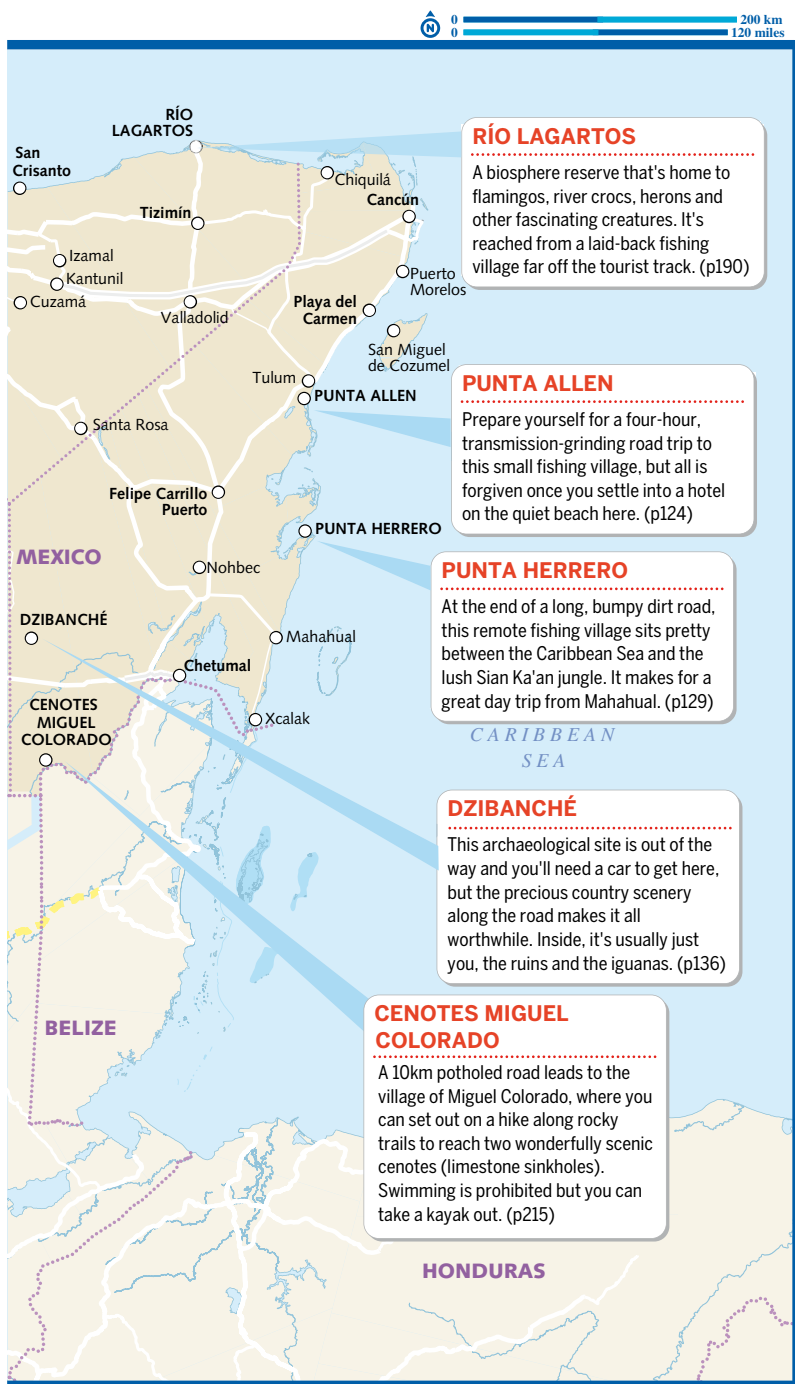
## OXKUTZCAB

Most people are usually just passing through here before visiting the Grutas de Loltún, a sprawling nearby cave system. But checking out the town's sights and regional cooking certainly has its rewards if you're craving local flavor. (p168)

## EL TIGRE

These recently uncovered Maya ruins set in wetlands see few visitors. It's believed to be none other than the place where conquistador Hernan Cortés executed Cuahtémoc, the last Aztec ruler of Tenochtitlán. (p215)





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