

Mexico

WINNER: RIVIERA MAYA

The 86-mile coastline stretching from just south of Cancún down to Tulum is lined with dense viridian jungle, sun-bleached sand, and natural limestone pools. Here are the places to see and stay along the way. —Adam Erace



1. STAY: MAYAKOBA

Part of a four-resort development, the **Rosewood Mayakoba** (from \$695 per night, rosewoodhotels.com) has luxe suites with private plunge pools, and the dining is big-city quality, thanks to all-star chef Juan Pablo Loza. Nearby, spend a blissful afternoon at the **Banyan Tree Spa Mayakoba** (banyantree.com), where treatments enhanced with Melipona honey are held in pavilions nestled among trees.

2. STAY: MAHEKAL BEACH RESORT

The best thing about this cluster of airy casitas in Playa del Carmen is its

location: at the beach, yet just two blocks from the shops and bars on bustling Fifth Avenue. Of the resort's four pools, the palm-fringed one by Fuego restaurant is quiet and has the comfiest lounge chairs (from \$190 per night, mahekalbeachresort.com).

3. EAT: LA CUEVA DEL CHANGO

Spread out under a lush jungle canopy, the atmospheric hangout opens early for fresh-pressed fruit juice. Come evening, head here for grilled tuna tostadas and wine from Mexico's buzzy Valle de Guadalupe (lacuevadelchango.com).

4. SWIM: CENOTE JARDÍN DEL EDÉN

Set at the end of a long, rocky path off the highway, the large swimming hole has rocks to dive off and helpful staff. Go early to avoid the crowds.

5. STAY: HOTEL ESENCIA

This lush 50-acre estate on empty Xpu-ha Beach looks more Mediterranean than Mayan (which makes sense, since it once belonged to an Italian duchess). Amenities at the 29-room hotel include sunrise yoga, a cold-pressed-juice bar, and afternoon tea (from \$615 per night, hotelseencia.com).

6. STAY: UNICO 20°87° HOTEL RIVIERA MAYA

This 448-room, adults-only newcomer has even the most seasoned travelers reconsidering their allergy to all-inclusives. Amenities include unlimited golf, select spa treatments, and activities like dolphin swims—plus 24/7 butler service (from \$365 per night, unicohotelrivieramaya.com).

7. EAT: ANTOJITOS LA CHIAPANECA

The al pastor tacos from this hole-in-the-wall are the main reason to leave the beach and go into town. Get them topped with caramelized pineapple, white onion, and cilantro.



2. Cabo San Lucas

This resort-filled town is located on the southernmost tip of Baja California Sur, where the Sea of Cortez and the Pacific Ocean meet. It's marked by El Arco ("The Arch"), a huge rock formation reachable by water taxi.

3. Cancún

The Underwater Museum of Art has 500-plus life-size sculptures 13 to 26 feet below sea level, mostly of human figures. See them by snorkeling, scuba diving, or taking a glass-bottom-boat tour.

4. Puerto Vallarta

Spend some time away from the beach with a boat trip through the narrow mangrove canals of El Salado Estuary, home to more than 100 bird species.

5. Cozumel

According to local legend, this island off the coast of Playa del Carmen was home to Ixchel, the goddess of love and fertility. Follow in her footsteps at the Mayan temple San Gervasio, where she is said to have been worshipped.



THE NO. 1 BEACH VACATION MUST-HAVE: A GUEST ROOM RIGHT ON THE WATER.

ILLUSTRATION BY LAURA FORMISANO