

caribbean

TRAVEL beyond the beach

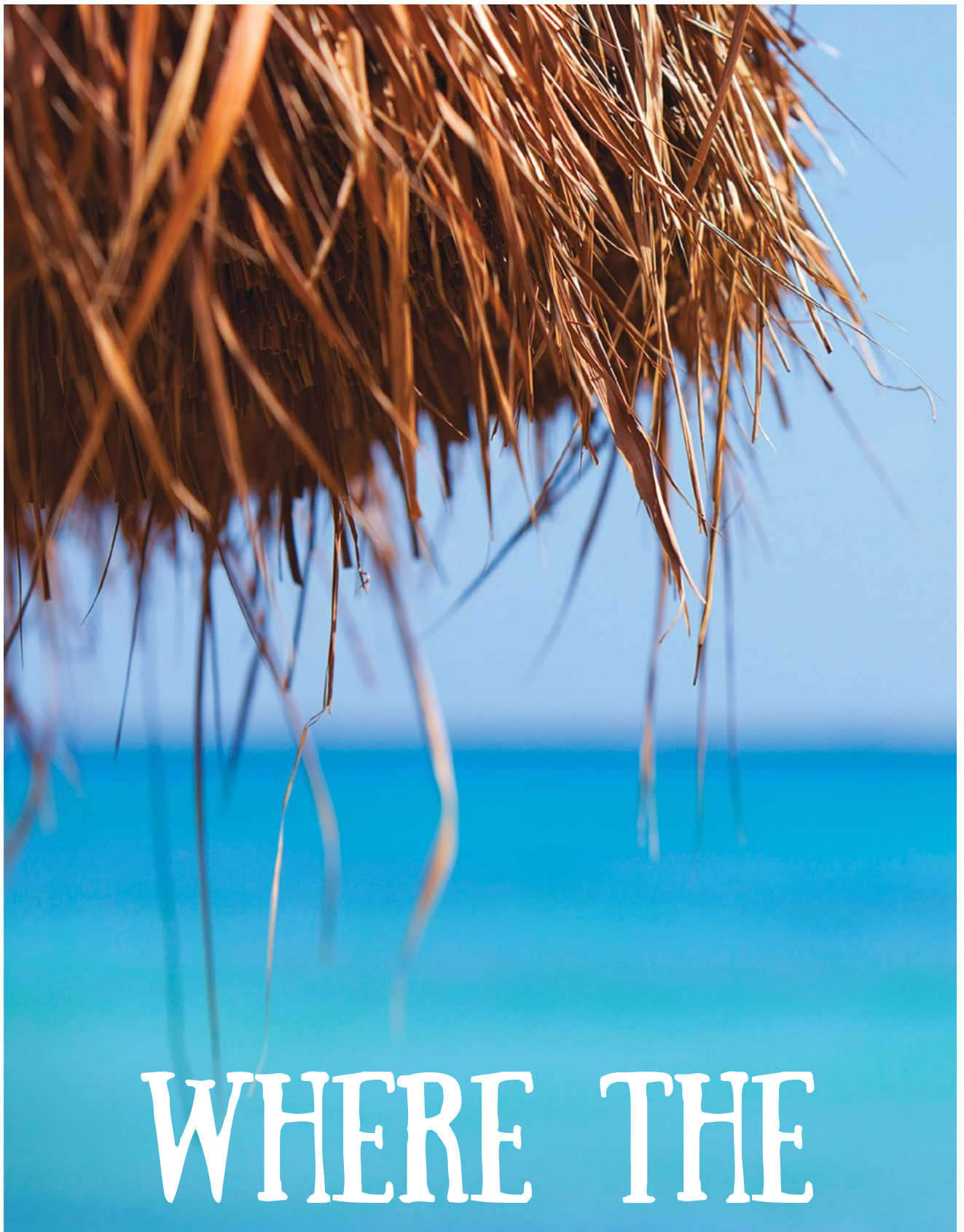
living



WATER

display until September 29, 2018
\$6.95 US caribbeanlivingmagazine.com





WHERE THE



WATER IS...

MAHEKAL

BY Robin Subar

THE **ZIMMERMAN** AGENCY
(continued)





WATER AS A CATALYST

“El agua es divino, eh?” I overhear a 30-something woman excitedly querying her friend as the sea water playfully splashes her ankles during a morning stroll down the powdery white sands of the Caribbean shoreline.

I must say, I wholeheartedly agree with her. The water IS divine!

I assume I’m not the only person who experiences an injection of mental tranquility and creativity when I head to the water. The fact is, over the years I have done some of my best work near water. I recall a New Year’s Eve on the bank of Sydney Harbour, transfixed on the iconic fireworks display when inspiration struck as luminously as the scene in front of me and prompted me to alter the course of my life.

Right now, I’m here at the Mahekal Beach Resort because of the pivotal decision I made that night at the Harbour. It doesn’t surprise me in the least that I have landed at The Mahekal, a play on the Spanish word for “magical”. Will the feathered sapphire waters of the Caribbean present me with yet another revelation on my life’s journey?

AN OASIS

Interestingly, The Mahekal Beach Resort in Playa del Carmen is itself an oasis. Situated within the tropical jungle of the Riviera Maya it is a mere seashell’s throw from the bustling shops and restaurants of Playa del

Carmen’s 5th Avenue/Avenida Quinta. Mahekal even offers complimentary bicycles for guests to enjoy the city at their leisure. The beauty of this location? Your Uber app can have a rest too.

The Mahekal is the perfect relaxed, raw luxury resort for the discerning traveler and an ideal spot for a wedding or family gathering. Its 920 feet of dotted palm tree coastline, exquisitely appointed Mayan architecture, exemplary service, food as mouthwatering as it is Insta worthy and thoughtful amenities seemingly cherry-picked by your mother, such as fluorescent green earplugs, and enough water bottles, shampoo and towels to well outlast your stay, harmoniously coexist.

With a single large screen on the premises, this eco-friendly resort has your back when it comes to relationships, a digital detox one might say. It encourages couples to converse, friends to fraternize and families to feel bonded while engaging in wholesome activities like swimming, paddleboarding, painting pottery or spending an evening chilling at the fire pit while listening to live acoustic jazz.

And if wholesome isn’t your thing, grab a seat at Boli’s bar (named for Ignacio Boli, Mahekal’s seasoned concierge extraordinaire) for a tequila class with Carlos that rivals any Napa wine tasting.

“The low tech profile of Mahekal is what differentiates us from most resorts.”

General Manager, Attila Gombos proudly explains, “The low tech profile of Mahekal is what differentiates us from most resorts. Our guests are not entertained by technology.” Apparently Mahekal was unwired for internet until 2016 when market demand called the shots. High speed internet is now located throughout the resort. “That (low tech) coupled with our low turnover in staff sets us apart. Many of our employees have been with us over 20 years because we believe in treating people well.”

Strong cultures stem from the top down. Attila is as friendly and hospitable as they come. Hence (unbeknownst to Attila until now), I nicknamed him “Attila The Honey” juxtaposed to the infamous leader.

Attila conveyed that after an 18 million dollar investment in 2016 the 125 room resort concluded a three-year renovation and expanded to 195 rooms. I was told that the occupancy rate during my stay was 92% and I have yet to believe that as factual since the garden pathways were virtually empty!

Grupo Diarq’s architect and designer Hilda Espino fell in love with the project initially because of the expansive beachfront and collection delicious and private bungalows. Her delight in bohemian-chic sang to me as I made my way down the hand-laid stone pathway to Room 130 and up the timbered deck to the turquoise, orange and fuschia throw pillowed lounge, personal Mayan hammock and plunge pool on my ocean front terrace. Computations flooded my brain as I entertained the idea of selling my house in Chicago.

And the indigenously inspired interior is equally spectacular with punches of vibrant Mexican color throughout. Over the king bed decorated with lush leaves is the room’s commanding centerpiece, a grand piece of organic wood from the Mayan forest. The oversized wooden louvered shades promise complete privacy or provide sneak previews of the tide. Hidden cultural gems can be found in every nook and cranny from the clothing hooks, which were once pieces of driftwood collected by locals on the beach to the colorful clay soap dishes, a signature of the staff from the Artisan Hut. The scent of unlit incense softly blankets the room.





RAIN SHOWER

There is simply nothing quite so natural as being exposed to the elements while bathing. I've vowed that when I am overcome by the stresses of city life, I will call up the heavenly sensation of bathing under the moon shower, enveloped in the gentle ocean breeze as I notice the cloud formations parade through the azure sky.

MAYAN SPA

A close second on my list of Zen experiences is a visit to the Revive Spa offering individual and couples treatment rooms, a VIP therapy room with its own indoor and outdoor shower, locally sourced organic products, a new fitness facility and my personal favorite, the dramatic Mayan inspired circular spa. The Mayans believe that energy moves in circles and one dip in the soothing water affirms their conviction. A glance toward the heavens and I am blanketed by glowing stars (fiber optic lights) descending from the soaring thatched roof. The fresh scent of copal, a local tree resin known for its cleansing properties permeates the air.

This was the prelude to my "Angel Veil with Crystal Quartz" Mahekal's signature massage. From the moment I am horizontal on the table, I drift away, drunk on the elixir of excessive pampering.





4 POOLS

Many guests may not realize that there are actually 4 pools on the resort. The oceanfront infinity pool at Las Olas, allows its guests to linger at the edge until sunset while sipping specialty drinks like freshly pressed cucumber jalapeno margaritas. Sun-seekers luxuriate alongside the Itzi Pool which boasts a swim up bar. The newest pool, Fuego offers white cabanas for the guests seeking more privacy. Mahekal's Groups and Wedding consultant Laura, led us through the portion of the resort where the 4th pool, The Jungle Pool is tucked away amid dense enchanting greenery. This section of the resort is a haven for nature lovers. I can just imagine my two sons on a search and rescue mission for Iguanas and their sheer delight over stumbling upon exotic critters such as the raccoon-like Coatis and marsupial Sereques that inhabit the jungles of Quintana Roo.

AGUAFRESCA

During lunch, I learn that the pumpkin shell on my placemat is a Jicara , or Mayan glassware. The restorative aguafresca (fresh cucumber and lemon) is the perfect finale to my massage. Gabriel, formerly the masseuse and now Mahekal's knowledgeable and unofficial G.O. , explains that the Jicara drilled with a small hole is nature's own thermos and can keep water chilled all day long. I soak up the cultural nuances that are eagerly conveyed by Mahekal's attentive staff.

"Look Robin, the fisherman are arriving now!" exclaims Gabriel. I grab my camera to capture the chef encountering his latest supply of Huachinango (Red Snapper) straight from the sea. This fish-to-fork delight takes place twice a week. Julieta is busily preparing her ceviche station with onion, tomato, cilantro, garlic and lemon. Guests are offered Mahekal's signature Allende beer, while Executive Chef Nerey and his staff seamlessly weigh and fillet today's catch right on the beach. They are then preparing fish Tikin Xic in the authentic Tulum style wood burning oven. I help myself to a plate of fish with chilimico (lemon, onion and garlic) and green aguachile (cucumber, onion, garlic, salt and pepper) sauce. Can I bottle these delightful sauces AND this moment, please?

Karen, Mahekal's outstanding Sales Consultant, has organized an outing on Day 2 to visit neighboring Tulum and Gran Cenote. The Mayan ruins of Tulum are one of the most well known archaeological sites in the world and date back to 564 A.D. The picturesque ruins settled against the backdrop of the Caribbean make for photo ops galore and a lesson in carpe diem. Karen oozes with enthusiasm when she talks about her work with Mahekal, "I am in love with this place and everyone knows it!"





GRAN CENOTE

As the thermometer begins to rise, the cenote beckons us. What is a cenote? Quite simply, it is where Mayans communicated with the gods. Cenotes are natural sinkholes resulting from the collapse of limestone bedrock, found primarily in the Yucatan where fresh water and sea water interface. I am astonished at the number of tourists who travel to the Yucatan each year, unaware of this natural wonder of the world. Since I became familiar with cenotes, this experience has made its way to my bucket list. Over 10,000 cenotes can be found in the peninsula, all connected through a system of subterranean rivers.

“Jump in!”, Karen screams joyfully. I need a moment to take in nature’s own turquoise swimming pool surrounded by a canopy of jungle. “I’m coming!” I shout. In seconds I am floating in the crisp vitamin and mineral rich water of the cenote. A group of snorkelers are examining turtles and

conversing in a flurry of foreign languages and dialects. I towel off and marvel at the nourishing effect the cenote had on my skin, which feels softer and smoother.

We climb into the van and Karen insists we listen to the Canadian band “Tragically Hip” from her tiny iPhone speaker, an apropos choice for our upcoming lunch. There is certainly nothing tragic happening here, but I can’t wait to encounter the “hip” of Tulum!

As we head down Tulum’s narrow road we find ourselves engulfed in a sea of bicycles, shops, restaurants, eco-boutique hotels and yoga studios. The restaurant at Nomade is our destination and we are perched on a cliff overlooking the beach. I inquire about the restroom and am directed with the pass code “IM SO RELAXED 123”. Need I say more?



THE VIDA AQUATIC DIVE CENTER - PADDLE BOARDING

My trip wouldn't be complete without putting a check next to paddle boarding on my bucket list. The Vida Aquatic Dive Center is one of Playa Del Carmen's oldest dive centers offering both underwater and onwater encounters like scuba, kayaking, paddle boarding and snorkeling. I sip my spiced Mexican coffee while viewing a how to YouTube video on my laptop and conclude that experiential learning is in order.

"I can do this. I am athletic", I assure myself harkening back to old SNL skits of Stuart Smalley's Daily Affirmations. I won't permit the 'what if's' to get in my way. My sculpted Latin instructor helps me pull myself up on the board while gently breaking the news, "You will probably fall at least 10 times before you stand". 10 times? Wow, that is a lot of water to swallow! But I manage to organize my legs to a kneeling position and begin to stand. I'll show him 10 times. He shouts "Look in front of you at all times!" I only catch the words 'look in fro' as I awkwardly tumble into the ocean and the rest of his sentence is swallowed by the waves.

I manage to beat the odds and my 6th try is a success. Paddle boarding is quite a workout but the rewards of gliding on the sparkling sea, inspires me and pushes me out of my comfort zone to reflect and plan my next chapter.

The water has worked its magic again.

PACKAGES:

Committed to accommodating discerning travelers' evolving needs, guests have the flexibility to create a vacation package that fits their preference, size and budget. When making a reservation, travelers may opt for the room-rate only European Plan (EP), starting at \$190/night, or select the Modified American Plan (MAP), a semi-inclusive offering with breakfast and the choice of lunch or dinner daily, with rates beginning at \$240/night (taxes and gratuities not included). The two rate options make it easier than ever for guests to dine on- and off- property as often as they wish, providing an enhanced ability for groups, bridal parties and other guests to personalize each and every stay.

LOCATION


Mahekal is located in the heart of Playa del Carmen between Calle 38 Norte and the Caribbean Sea. Walking distance to 5th Avenue (Quinta Avenida)

NEARBY EXCURSIONS

Tulum – Ruins, Town, Beach
Xcaret – Archeological site
Merida – Capital town
Town of Valladolid
Chichen Itza - Ruins
Lago Bacalar (lake of 7 colors)

ADDRESS

Calle 38 Norte
Playa del Carmen, Quintana Roo Mexico 77710
Cancun International Airport
55.2 km, 45-minute drive to resort
www.mahekalbeachresort.com
Toll-free 1(877) 235 4452.

 Robin Subar