

# denver life®

5 fun winter festivals from Loveland to Telluride

Colorado's leading lifestyle magazine

## THE TRAVEL ISSUE

**Pick your paradise:**  
**Mexico, Italy, Belgium,**  
**Peru, plus top resorts**  
**here in Colorado**

### **Ski legend**

A chat with Aspen's Klaus Obermeyer

### **Airport style**

How to look chic on the plane

### **Popcorn power**

A gourmet twist on our favorite snack

### **Love notes**

Sweet ideas for Valentine's Day

Make a  
splash at the  
new Hotel  
Talisa in  
Vail. p. 82

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## CHOOSE YOUR OWN ADVENTURE

Can't decide where to spend your next vacation? If you loved those children's books that prompted you to pick option A or B at the end of each decision point, our guide to getaways at home (think Aspen, above) and abroad (picture yourself strolling the beach in Playa del Carmen, below) will get you started on the perfect journey. From romantic retreats to kid-friendly resorts to foodie dream trips, the perfect destination awaits. Choosing will be the hardest part.





IF YOU WANT: AN ON-THE-BEACH RETREAT

## GO TO PLAYA DEL CARMEN, MEXICO

Just steps from the water, the Mahekal Beach Resort is a tropical paradise BY LESLEY KENNEDY

**Forty-two steps. That was the distance from the door of our ocean-front palapa at Mahekal Beach Resort to the water.** And as if that proximity doesn't sound magical enough ("mahekal" is "magical" in the ancient Mayan language), you have yet to hear about the hammocks, lounge chairs and plunge pool on our tropical terrace. Or the shutter doors we could lock, but leave open at night, allowing the crashing waves to lull us to sleep. Or the private moon shower we used repeatedly. Or the clean, bright boho accents that decorated the comfy space. Or the thoughtful amenities left in our room each day (mezcal shots and truffles, macarons, chocolate-covered strawberries, chips and guac and margaritas).

And that only covers the room. Tucked between Playa del Carmen's longest stretch of beach and the Riviera Maya jungle—and just a block from the bustling Quinta Avenida (Fifth Avenue) shopping district teeming with souvenirs, street performers and restaurants—Mahekal originated some 50 years ago with six thatched-roof beach-front

palapas (traditional Mexican shelters with palm leaves or branches for roofs) that were rented to backpackers. Today, the resort, which recently underwent a three-year, \$16 million renovation, boasts nearly 200 private villas (ocean, garden view, treehouses, casitas and more, each with its own patio area), four swimming pools (including one with a swim-up bar), a seaside hot tub, the Mayan-inspired Revive Spa and fitness center and five restaurants—all surrounded by immaculate lush gardens and a colorful explosion of bougainvillea. We weren't surprised to learn it was named one of *Travel + Leisure's* Ten Best Resorts in Mexico in 2016, or that so many couples choose to get married here, barefoot on the beach, on a platform atop the infinity pool or in an open-air ball room. The resort's planners take care of everything from venue to flowers to menu to cake, and Mayan ceremonies, performed by a native shaman in his ancient dialect with a Copal ritual meant to cleanse the air, are available.

MAHEKAL BEACH RESORT





## A taste of the Caribbean

The semi-inclusive Modified American Plan (rates start at \$240 per night) includes breakfast and lunch or dinner daily. It's easy to fill up at the breakfast buffet at Las Olas, which sits next to a gorgeous infinity pool overlooking the sea, and offers rotating daily specials (build your own smoothie, tacos or waffles, for example). Coffee, green juice and house-made pastries? Chilaquiles, roasted potatoes and peppers and cinnamon-sugar tortillas? Yes, please. And we could have made a meal of the global appetizer buffet alone at Cocina (ceviche, yucca fries, sushi, pasta—you name it, they had it). But Fuego is the real restaurant gem here. All meals at the open-air restaurant with ocean views are prepared over the Tulum-style wood-burning oven. We still dream of the grilled panela cheese appetizer, served with Mexican-style bread, a trio of chimichurris and molcajete sauce, the seared yellowfin salad and the Cuban jumbo shrimp paired with mushroom polenta. The mezcal wasn't bad either. Feeling romantic? Book a private table in the sand and



**MAGICAL MAHEKAL** CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: STROLL THE BEACH, SNOOZE IN AN AIRY PALAPA, SAVOR FRESH SEAFOOD, LEARN TO SCUBA DIVE AND TAKE A SWIM AT THE RESORT.

dine like royalty during a four-course feast (you'd be silly not to order the fresh Caribbean lobster). When you feel like wandering into town, just ask Boli, Mahekal's famed concierge, for recommendations.

## The ultimate relaxation

We didn't count the steps from our door to the entrance of Revive Spa, but had it been possible, we would have retraced those steps multiple times during our stay—if only for a few more minutes in the ultra-serene Jacuzzi room. Upon arrival, you change into your bathing suit for a pre-treatment soak in the round space (true to Mayan tradition) with a palapa-style roof and an enchanting fiber-optic ceiling that makes you feel as if you are floating below glowing stars. We never wanted to leave that tub. Begrudgingly, you will eventually have to remove yourself from your

state of bliss, although a 50-minute aromatherapy massage is certainly a nice consolation.

## Swim, snorkel or salsa

When you tire of lying in your hammock or beach chair (life is rough, we know), take a scuba diving lesson or cenote snorkel tour with the award-winning Vida Aquatic

## GET SPORTY

There are no TVs in the rooms at Mahekal (who needs 'em?), but if you just can't miss your favorite football game, head to **Boli's Bar**, where they'll be happy to throw it on the screen (watching the Spanish broadcast is a kick!). Order up a craft beer or cocktail made with fresh-pressed juice, play some pool or Ping-Pong or grab a book from the library. It's play time!

Dive Center, conveniently located on-property; the center also offers a daily snorkeling tour of Playa's coral reefs. Or join a yoga session, shop at the on-site boutique, rent bikes, hang out at the artisan area where you can paint ceramic pottery or take advantage of weekly complimentary activities including tequila tastings, guacamole-making lessons, salsa dancing, beach barbecues and more. For something different, book a Sips & Strokes painting experience with a local artist (wine included) and take home your Mayan memento.



**MAHEKAL BEACH RESORT**  
Playa del Carmen, Mexico  
[mahekalbeachresort.com](http://mahekalbeachresort.com)