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Photo: Chris Wimpey

Escape to the Sun

Driving down Quinta Avenida, we see bright colors in the windows of the artisan shops and locals bustling around. A light breeze carries the scent of fresh Mexican cuisine. We're immersed in a vibrant, welcoming culture. I squeeze my husband's hand in excitement. Just steps from the energetic street is the bohemian escape, **Mahekal Beach Resort**.

We're greeted with cool, cucumber scented towels and a refreshing mango mojito. We're led towards our bungalow on a path shaded by a naturally occurring canopy. Situated on the longest stretch of beach in Playa del Carmen, the eco-friendly resort is thoughtfully designed to be as un-intrusive as possible on the environment.

Seeing two hammocks on our private terrace, I smile at my husband in anticipation of lazily swaying together. Our bright room is filled with intriguing Mexican décor and pottery. We change for dinner at Mahekal's oceanfront restaurant, Fuego.

Walking past large, wood-burning ovens, we smell the mesquite wood they use to prepare their food. The open air restaurant, under a palapa roof, lets you hear the waves and feel a light, salty breeze while you peruse a "farm-to-fork" locally sourced menu.

Our waiter suggests a red wine from Casa Madero Winery, the oldest winery in the Americas! The sound of sizzling heralds the arrival of my steak. Colorful plates are placed in front of us with fresh, delicious meals.

The next morning we wake to birds chirping. I open my eyes and see the ocean from my bed. Las Olas restaurant and pool is just steps from our room, and we go there for a buffet of quesadillas, egg dishes, and fresh smoothies.

Finding lounge chairs, we wade into the the infinity pool to lean over its edge. We order pool-side strawberry daiquiris and before we know it, it's time for our romantic couple's massage.

After spending a few minutes in the private hot tub, we're led to the beach for our massage. Already feeling pampered, the experi-

ence is completed with a tray of fresh fruit and champagne.

Feeling rested, we explore Quinta Avenida, walking to a restaurant and enjoying an outdoor dinner. Browsing the shops afterward, a mariachi band passes through the street, the music gradually rising as they approach and fading as they pass by. We head back to Boli's bar at Mahekal for drinks and a game of pool.

The next morning we go to the gym for a quick workout and

then check out the Mahekal Boutique, with its art, jewelry, and clothing in beautiful, striking colors, some with intricate embroidery. Each shelf has a photo of a featured local artisan and their story.

We make our way to the Fuego pool and a friendly waiter takes our drink order. Without lifting a finger we find ourselves in the pool, drink in hand, while the sun warms our faces.

Later in the day we try our hand at pottery painting with a "Sips & Strokes" class! I giggle seeing my husband's brow furrow in concentration. He is very proud of his piggy bank, Pepe the Pig.

Laughing at the paint on my hands, we clean up for our "toes in the sand" dinner. We meet our waiter at reception and he leads us to a table on the beach with two tall chairs facing out at the water. A gorgeous flower arrangement graces the table, and a canopy of string lights creates an enchanting glow.

Our multi-course dinner is a decadent meal of local cuisine. After a table-side poured soup, we try handmade tortillas and plates of land and sea. We try the

drink of the month, a mix of mezcal and hibiscus. My husband and I look at each other with no doubt we're experiencing the dinner of a lifetime.

Lingering over the last of our champagne, we don't want the night to end. My husband stands to pull my chair out and we follow the path back. My head resting on his familiar shoulder, I wish we could live every day so simply. — Kate Shapiro

Mahekal Beach Resort

877.235.4452, www.mahekalbeachresort.com



Press Photos