The Accidental Gringo
CANCÚN & RIVIERA MAYA

# Your Local Guest Guide

## Real information. Better days.

Practical tips, must-see places, and local insights to help you spend less time planning and more time enjoying the Mexican Caribbean.

**FREE for you and your guests**

No subscription.
No setup fee.
No contract.

Beaches & Island Time | Day Trips & Attractions | Snorkeling & Wildlife | Cenotes & Nature | Food, Drinks & Nightlife | Getting Around (with or without a car)

## Start with the kind of day you want

Not sure where to begin? Choose the style of day that fits your mood. Each option includes top places to go, what to do, and who it's best for. Tap into the full guide for details, maps and more ideas.



### Beach + easy

Cancun / Isla Mujeres

Best when you want turquoise water, a relaxed pace and plenty of food or drink options nearby.

- Hotel Zone beaches, beach clubs and resorts
- Isla Mujeres' Playa Norte and relaxed island vibe
- Great for couples, families and first-time visitors



### Wildlife + water

Akumal

Choose this when turtles, snorkeling and a quieter bay matter more than shopping or nightlife.

- Snorkel with sea turtles in Akumal
- Calm, shallow bays and reef areas
- Great for families, nature lovers and photographers



### Nature + adventure

Cenotes / Xplor

Go this direction for swimming underground, zip lines, jungle roads and a more active day.

- Cenote routes (open-air and cave cenotes)
- Parks like Xcaret, Xel-Há, Xplor and Xavage
- Great for adventurers, families and groups



### Culture + food

Valladolid / Xcaret

A better fit when you want Yucatecan food, history, architecture or a full cultural experience.

- Colonial towns, cenotes and local markets
- Mayan history and cultural attractions
- Great for curious travelers, food lovers and day trippers



### Slow coastal day

Puerto Morelos

Good for travelers who want reef time, seafood and a smaller beach-town rhythm.

- Reef snorkeling and relaxed beaches
- Great local restaurants and a laid-back vibe
- Ideal for couples and anyone who prefers a quieter day



### Island escape

Holbox

Best when slowing down is part of the goal and you are willing to spend more of the day getting there.

- Laid-back island, sandbars and nature
- Bicycles or golf carts instead of cars
- Great for relaxed travelers, couples and nature lovers

## How to use this guide

This PDF gives you evergreen ideas that will always be useful: where places are, what each area is good for, how to plan your day and what to expect. For anything that can change — like schedules, prices, closures, current conditions or transportation options — **use The Accidental Gringo online** for the latest information.

Interactive maps | Schedules & hours | Current prices | Updates & alerts

GO TO LIVE GUIDE
theaccidentalgringo.com

# THE REGION AT A GLANCE

A simple overview to help you understand where things are and choose the best experiences for your trip.



**One region. Many experiences.**

Beaches, islands, jungle, cenotes, culture, and more — all within a few hours.




## Anchor experiences

Signature places that showcase the best of the region.



### Xcaret

CULTURE + NATURE

A world-class park that blends nature, underground rivers, cultural experiences and a spectacular evening show. Ideal for travelers who want a full, polished day in one place.

Great for families · Plan a full day



### Xel-Há

WATER + RELAXATION

A natural inlet and eco park focused on snorkeling, floating and easy, all-inclusive fun. A great choice when you want a relaxed day in thie water with activities for all ages.

Great for families · Plan a full day



### Xplor

ADVENTURE

Zip lines, amphibious vehicles, caves and underground rivers. Perfect for active travelers who want a day of adventure in a safe, well-run park.

Great for adventure seekers · Plan a full day

### Xenses

SENSORY + HALF DAY

CURRENT OPTION

A half-day park built around optical illusions, caves, sensory routes and playful photo spots. A flexible choice

Great for families, couples and curious travelers

## How to read the region

The Riviera Maya is more than just Cancun. Here's a simple way to think about it:



### North / Islands

Beaches, easy access and island escapes.

- **Cancún** – beaches, resorts, nightlife, easy logistics
- **Costa Mujeres** – quieter, upscale, beach-focused
- **Isla Mujeres** – island charm, calm water, great for a day trip

**Best for:** beach time, first-time visitors, couples, families and easy day trips.



### Central Riviera Maya

Reef, beach towns and marine life.

- **Puerto Morelos** – relaxed coastal town, reef snorkeling, great food
- **Playa del Carmen** – beaches, dining, shopping, easy access to parks and cenotes
- **Akumal** – sea turtles, calm bay, relaxed atmosphere

**Best for:** snorkeling, marine life, variety and a mix of beach and adventure.



### South / Inland

History, nature and a slower pace.

- **Tulum** – beaches, ruins, boho vibe
- **Cenote routes** – open-air and cave cenotes in the jungle
- **Valladolid** – colonial town, Yucatecan food, nearby cenotes
- **Holbox** – laid-back island, sand streets, nature, more time required

**Best for:** culture, cenotes, nature, and travelers who want to slow down.

# CANCÚN: BEACHES, NIGHTLIFE & BIG-NAME EXPERIENCES

Sun, sea, great food and world-famous nightlife. Cancun is the perfect mix of resort relaxation and easy access to island trips, cenotes, theme parks and Riviera Maya day adventures.

**PERFECT FOR**

- First-time visitors
- Beach lovers
- Food & nightlife
- Easy day trips
- Families & groups

## Where would you like to explore?

Tap a destination to see guides, maps, top spots and local tips.

Use the live guide for full details, maps, tours and latest information.

EXPLORE ONLINE →



### Cancún

Beaches, resorts, nightlife & more

Explore Cancún →



### Isla Mujeres

Island beaches, snorkeling & charm

Explore Isla Mujeres →



### Puerto Morelos

A relaxed beach town with a local feel

Explore Puerto Morelos →



### Akumal

Turtles, calm water & a family-friendly vibe

Explore Akumal →



### Cenotes

Swim in incredible natural wonders

Explore Cenotes →



### Holbox

A slower island escape

Explore Holbox →



### Valladolid

Colonial charm, cenotes & Yucatecan food

Explore Valladolid →

## What Cancún does best

Cancún is more than just a beach. It's a great home base for relaxation, entertainment, shopping, dining and easy day trips to some of the region's best experiences.



### Beach + resort day

The Hotel Zone offers beautiful beaches, resort pools, beach clubs and restaurants, all within a compact area. It's easy to enjoy a full day without a car and with minimal planning.

- Iconic beaches and turquoise water
- Beach clubs and all-inclusive options
- Great dining from casual to upscale
- Easy to combine with shopping or nightlife

**Best for:** couples, families, first-time visitors and anyone who wants an easy, no-stress day.




### Nightlife

Cancún is one of the most famous nightlife destinations in the world. From high-energy shows to casual beach bars, you'll find options for every style and budget.

- **Coco Bongo** – show-driven, high-energy
- **Señor Frog's** – casual, fun and social
- **The Club District** – multiple venues close together
- **Beach bars** – relaxed, oceanfront vibe

**Best for:** adults, groups and travelers who want an exciting night out.



### Easy departures

Cancún is a major launch point for top day trips. The airport, ferry terminal and tour pickups are easy to access, making it simple to explore nearby islands, cenotes and Riviera Maya attractions.

- Ferry to Isla Mujeres
- Day trips to Xcaret, Xel-Há, Xplor and more
- Tours, private transfers and group options
- Close to beaches, shopping and dining

**Best for:** travelers who want to see more of the region without changing hotels.

## Popular nights out

Three iconic experiences, three different vibes.



### Coco Bongo

A high-energy show with music, dancers, acrobatics and a big-production atmosphere. It feels more like a live show than a traditional nightclub.

**Best for: a one-of-a-kind night**



### Señor Frog's

A casual, playful and group-friendly atmosphere with music, drinks and a fun party vibe. Great for a relaxed, social night out.

**Best for: groups and casual fun**



### Hotel Zone club district

Several well-known clubs and bars are located close together in the Hotel Zone, making it easy to walk between venues once you are there.

**Best for: bar-hopping and nightlife**

## Good Cancún day rhythms

Simple ways to plan a great day without overdoing it.

| | |
|---|---|
| **Easy first day** | Beach or pool in the morning, long lunch, then an early evening walk or dinner. Keep it relaxed if you just arrived. |
| **Island + nightlife** | Spend the day on Isla Mujeres, return to Cancún, rest, then head out later. A great mix of nature and nightlife. |
| **Culture + evening show** | Visit a museum or archaeological site, shop or explore, then enjoy a major evening experience like Coco Bongo. |
| **Shopping + dinner** | Explore malls and local shops in the Hotel Zone, then enjoy dinner and drinks with a view. |

# ISLA MUJERES

## A SMALL ISLAND WITH A FULL DAY OF CHOICES

Beaches, snorkeling, great food, local charm and unforgettable views — just 20 minutes from Cancún.

### WHY GO?

- Easy 20-minute ferry
- Incredible beaches
- Laid-back island vibe
- Great for couples & families
- Easy to explore

## ISLA MUJERES MAP

KEY AREAS, BEACHES & ATTRACTIONS




## TOP EXPERIENCES ON ISLA MUJERES

A mix of beaches, culture, nature and great food — all easy to explore.



### 1 Playa Norte

Wide, calm, turquoise water and soft white sand. Perfect for swimming, relaxing, and beach clubs. One of the most beautiful beaches in Mexico.

BEACH | SWIM | RELAX



### 2 Centro + Hidalgo

Walkable streets with shops, restaurants, cafés, art and local charm. A great place to slow down, explore and enjoy island life.

FOOD | SHOPPING | LOCAL CULTURE



### 3 Punta Sur

Dramatic cliffs, sea views, sculptures and walking trails. Home to the island's iconic Mayan temple and some of the best views.

NATURE | VIEWS | PHOTOS



### 4 Garrafón

A natural park with snorkeling, kayaks, zip lines and incredible views. A good option if you want a more structured activity day.

SNORKEL | ADVENTURE | VIEWS



### 5 Turtle / marine stops

Snorkeling tours visit reefs and underwater sculptures, and in season you may see sea turtles in the area.

SNORKEL | WILDLIFE | FAMILY FRIENDLY



### 6 Golf-cart loop

Rent a golf cart and explore the island at your own pace. Stop at beaches, viewpoints, and hidden spots along the way.

FREEDOM | SCENIC STOPS | EASY TO DO

## GETTING HERE

Ferry from Cancún
~20 minutes

Departures from Puerto Juárez (near downtown) and the Hotel Zone. Frequent service throughout the day.



**PRO TIP**
Buy round-trip tickets and check the last return time so you can enjoy the island without rushing.

## A SIMPLE ISLAND RHYTHM

**Morning**
Ferry over and explore Playa Norte.

**Midday**
Beach time, snorkeling or a long lunch.

**Afternoon**
Golf-cart loop, Punta Sur or Garrafón.

**Evening**
Return to Centro, dinner and one last walk before the ferry.

## GOOD TO KNOW

**Plan for a full day**
There's plenty to see and do.

**Great for couples, families and friends**
Something for every travel style.

**Bring essentials**
Reef-safe sunscreen, hat, water, cash (pesos).

**Keep it flexible**
Leave time for spontaneous stops.

# FIVE MORE PLACES WORTH BUILDING A DAY AROUND

**Different vibes. Different experiences. All within reach.**

Choose based on the kind of day you want, not just the name.

### GOOD TO KNOW

- All are great day trips
- Travel times vary
- Go earlier for a better experience
- Combine nearby stops when it makes sense
- Check the live guide for current conditions, prices and access



## Puerto Morelos

Relaxed coastal day

~ 25 min from Cancún

**WHAT IT'S LIKE**

A charming fishing town with a laid-back vibe, beautiful reef snorkeling, great seafood and a walkable town square. It feels more authentic and relaxed than Cancun or Playa del Carmen, making it perfect for a slower, lower-key day by the sea.

**BEST FOR**

- Couples & families
- Relaxed travelers
- Snorkelers
- Anyone who prefers a small-town feel

**PAIR IT WITH**

- Reef snorkeling
- Seafood lunch
- Nearby cenotes (when you have time)



## Akumal

Wildlife + calm water

~ 1 hr 15 min from Cancún

**WHAT IT'S LIKE**

Clear, calm water and one of the best places to snorkel with sea turtles. Akumal's bay is protected, making it ideal for marine life, relaxed beach time and a quieter atmosphere than larger resort areas. It's about the water and wildlife, not shopping or nightlife.

**BEST FOR**

- Wildlife lovers
- Families
- Snorkelers
- Travelers who want a calmer, nature-focused day

**PAIR IT WITH**

- Yal-Ku lagoon
- Nearby cenotes
- Beachside lunch
- Photos and relaxed beach time



## Cenotes

Nature + adventure

~ 30–90 min from Cancún

**WHAT IT'S LIKE**

Swim in crystal-clear freshwater in stunning natural settings. Cenotes range from open-air pools to dramatic cave systems, each with a different feel. You can keep it easy or make it an adventure — and many are close to each other, making it simple to visit more than one.

**BEST FOR**

- Swimmers
- Photographers
- Families & groups
- Active travelers

**PAIR IT WITH**

- Tulum or Valladolid
- Snorkeling
- Local food stop
- Combine 2–3 cenotes in one day



## Valladolid

Culture + food

~ 2 hrs from Cancún

**WHAT IT'S LIKE**

A beautiful colonial town with colorful streets, historic churches, local markets and some of the best Yucatecan food in the region. It's a great way to experience Mexican culture away from the coast, and it's close to several impressive cenotes.

**BEST FOR**

- Culture & history lovers
- Food lovers
- Photographers
- Travelers who want a slower, more authentic day

**PAIR IT WITH**

- Nearby cenotes (Zaci, Suytun, etc.)
- Chichén Itzá (when en route)
- Yucatecan lunch
- Local markets and shops



## Holbox

Slow island escape

~ 2.5–3 hrs from Cancún

**WHAT IT'S LIKE**

A laid-back island with sand streets, no high-rises, and a more relaxed, off-the-beaten-path atmosphere. Spend the day on quiet beaches, rent a bike or golf cart, enjoy fresh seafood and take in an unforgettable sunset. It's a full-day experience and works best when you have enough time to truly enjoy the island.

**BEST FOR**

- Relaxed travelers
- Couples & families
- Nature and sunset lovers
- Visitors who want to unplug

**PAIR IT WITH**

- Beach time
- Birdwatching (seasonal)
- Fresh seafood
- Sunset at Punta Cocos

## BUILD A SMARTER DAY

These places can be combined, but time matters. Choose one main area per day to spend more time experiencing and less time in transit.

**Check travel times**
Distances can be longer than they look.

**Plan a logical route**
Group nearby places when possible.

**Match the day to your group**
Consider energy level, interests and travel style.

**EXPLORE MORE ONLINE**

Get detailed guides, interactive maps, current schedules, prices and the latest local information.

theaccidentalgringo.com →

# BUILD THE RIGHT DAY

Start with your energy level, your group and what you actually want to experience. Here are six easy ways to shape an amazing day in Cancún & the Riviera Maya.

**THERE'S NO WRONG DAY**

Beach time, adventure, culture or a great night out — it's all here. Pick the style that fits your trip.



## Big attraction day

Xcaret / Xel-Ha

One destination, a full day of unforgettable experiences. Perfect when you want a mix of nature, culture, water activities, great food and an impressive evening show.

- Parks, shows and nature
- All-in-one experience
- Great for all ages

**Best for:** families, first-time visitors and anyone who wants a full, well-rounded day.

**XCARET**
Nature, culture and a world-class show.



## Adventure day

Xplor

Higher-energy activities for travelers who want to do more than the beach. Choose from zip lines, amphibious vehicles, underground rivers and extreme experiences.

- Zip lines and adventure parks
- Full-day, active experiences
- Great for adventure seekers

**Best for:** active travelers, groups and families with older kids.

**XPLOR**
Zip lines, caves and jungle adventure.



## Water + wildlife

Akumal / Isla Mujeres

Spend the day in and around the water. Snorkel with sea turtles in Akumal, enjoy calm, clear water in Isla Mujeres, or combine beach time with marine life experiences.

- Snorkeling and marine life
- Calm, clear Caribbean water
- Great for families and nature lovers

**Best for:** snorkelers, families and travelers who want a relaxed, water-focused day.

**AKUMAL**
Swim with sea turtles in their natural habitat.



## Culture + food

Valladolid

Step away from the coast and experience colonial streets, local markets, incredible Yucatecan food and nearby cenotes. A slower, more authentic day that shows a different side of the region.

- History, architecture and local culture
- Regional food and markets
- Pair with a nearby cenote

**Best for:** culture lovers, foodies and travelers who want a more local experience.

**VALLADOLID**
Colonial charm and Yucatecan flavor.



## Slow local day

Puerto Morelos

A laid-back fishing town with a relaxed beach-town feel. Enjoy reef snorkeling, seafood, the town square and a slower pace than Cancún or Playa del Carmen.

- Reef snorkeling
- Great seafood
- Small-town charm

**Best for:** couples, families and travelers who want to slow down.

**PUERTO MORELOS**
A relaxed pace and authentic coastal vibe.




## Night out

Cancún Hotel Zone

Plan the evening around one of the region's famous nightlife options — Coco Bongo, Señor Frog's or the many venues in the club district. A late night is easier when the daytime plan is light.

- Coco Bongo, Señor Frog's and more
- Bars and clubs close to each other
- Keep the rest of the day flexible

**Best for:** adults, groups and travelers who want an energetic evening.

**COCO BONGO**
A world-famous night out in Cancún.

## Keep the live version on your phone

The PDF is for evergreen planning ideas. The website is where current information belongs:

- Current conditions and seasonal notes
- Schedules, prices and operating changes
- Updated transportation guidance
- Interactive maps, videos and deeper destination guides

theaccidentalgringo.com

**EXPLORE ONLINE →**

