The best places to eat, sleep and play in Playa del Carmen this fall and winter

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INTRODUCTION

TripAdvisor, the most trusted source for where to eat, sleep and play in thousands of destinations around the world, has collected the best insider tips from its 50 million monthly visitors to produce a unique series of travel guides. In addition to the best hotels, restaurants and attractions for every type of traveler, you'll get great advice about what to pack, how to get around and where to find the best views. Be sure to check out the guides at www.tripadvisor.com.

Inside

PLAYA DEL CARMEN

There are places you go to get away from it all, and then there's Playa del Carmen, where you can get away from it all right in the middle of it all. And in this case, “it” is casual, beautiful and fun.

Playa, as the locals call it, is located on Mexico’s Yucatan Peninsula—about 40 miles south of Cancun—on the Caribbean coast. This once-sleepy fishing village has been discovered by those who crave white beaches, gentle surf and outdoor activities (including fishing, of course). But even with its “discovery,” Playa has retained its small-town charms. Buildings are low-rise and the atmosphere is still authentic and non-touristy.

The weather ranges between warm and hot in Playa, so be prepared to cool off at the beach all year long. September and October may bring storms or hurricanes, and November through January sees more precipitation. But rain is never constant, and the temperature rarely drops below 65ºF.

In Playa, restaurants and accommodations are varied and plentiful. And when the sun goes down, the temperature goes up—bars get into full swing around midnight and Avenida Quinta (Fifth Avenue) transforms from a family-friendly pedestrian way to a happening hot spot.

PACKING TIPS

1. “Pack your bathing suit in your carry-on! If your luggage gets waylaid, you can still go in the pool.” And don’t just bring one: “Pack two swimsuits so one can dry. Otherwise you’re putting on a damp suit every morning.”—TripAdvisor Member, United States

2. To keep your drink cool and sand-free on the beach, “take an insulated mug with a plastic lid, not a metal lid, as it will burn your mouth from the heat of the sun.”—TripAdvisor Member, Halifax, Nova Scotia

3. “What to pack? Long pants for men for restaurants, flip-flops, sunscreen, Imodium, just in case, and a good attitude!”—TripAdvisor Member, New Jersey

4. “I suggest to have a light sweater or jacket for the evening. You may not need it, but it can get to that temperature when it’s nice to have a sweater over the shoulders.”—TripAdvisor Member, Minnesota
Where to PLAY

FAMILIES

Fun for the whole family, **Dolphin Discovery** lets you get up and close with the dolphins. “The dolphins will do tricks for you and you will have the opportunity to share a kiss and ‘hug’ with the dolphin. The activity is suitable for children over the age of three or four.”—TripAdvisor Member, United States

**Dolphin Discovery, Mz 23 Plano 1 Lote 11, Centro Comercial Marina, Puerto Aventuras, 998 193 3360**

“There is one word to describe The Jungle Place: WOW! This is an amazing experience and probably a once-in-a-lifetime chance. How many people can say that they’ve gone to a monkey sanctuary where you can play with monkeys? The people that run the sanctuary were very nice and definitely keep the monkeys well treated. Absolutely amazing.”—TripAdvisor Member, Texas

**The Jungle Place, 30 minutes south of Playa Del Carmen, 984 116 9777**

At **Xcaret**, “we loved cruising around and getting lost. You always end up seeing more, which adds to the fun. One of the highlights of the day was swimming in the underground river. Mother Nature has done some unbelievable work there.”—TripAdvisor Member, Rabat, Morocco

**Xcaret, Blvd. Kukulcan, Km. 9.5, Hotel Zone, Cancun, 998 883 0470**

ROMANCE

“For our 20th wedding anniversary, my wife and I treated ourselves to a couples massage at **Veronica’s**. Without a doubt, this was a highlight of our trip. Never before had either one of us had massages so wonderful. Absolutely fantastic!”—TripAdvisor Member, Chicago, Ill.

**Veronica’s Massage, 5th Ave. and Constituyentes, 984 155 1242**

Relax or play on the white sand beach at **Rancho Punta Venado**, “where there is horseback riding, snorkeling or ATV riding.”—TripAdvisor Member, Playa del Carmen

**Rancho Punta Venado, located between Calica and Paamul, 998 887 1191**

“We went to **Coco Bongo** and absolutely LOVED it! The shows were amazing and entertaining. We had a waiter that brought us drinks all night. A new drink came as soon as the last one was almost empty!! There were so many people there, but we never felt crowded. I’d go back again in a heartbeat!”—TripAdvisor Member, Nova Scotia

**Coco Bongo, Av. 10 M31 L5 221, 984 803 3232**

BUDGET

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A short trip from Playa del Carmen, **Yal-ku Lagoon** is worth the side trip. For only seven dollars, “you feel like you are swimming in an aquarium with fish of every size and color. The walk leads you to a glassy, aqua pond jutted with rock abutments adorned with sculptures of mermaids.”—TripAdvisor Member, New Jersey

**Yal-ku Lagoon, Akumal**

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**Yal-ku Lagoon, Akumal**
**ADVENTURE**

“**Rio Secreto** is nature at its finest and possibly unlike any other place in the world. Our family had previously visited caves, however this was unique and quite different. The formations inside are unbelievable.”—TripAdvisor Member, Folsom, Calif.

**Rio Secreto Reserva Natural, Carretera Federal Cancun, Tulum 307 en Km. 282, 984 877 2377**

In **Discovery Jungle Park**, “you feel like Tarzan, or better yet, Jane. The game of the day is going from one tree to another, using a network of platforms and cables. It all begins with a fairly easy balance bridge, but it gets tougher and tougher, ending with the longest zipline I’ve ever been on. Very exhilarating.”—TripAdvisor Member, Mechelen, Belgium

Discovery Jungle Park, 984 206 2484

**With Dressel Divers**: “For a first-time diver, I could not have felt more comfortable and secure.”—TripAdvisor Member, Stevens Point, Wis.

**Dressel Divers, at Iberostar Paraiso Del Mar, [http://www.dresseldivers.com](http://www.dresseldivers.com)**

**“You feel like Tarzan, or better yet, Jane!”**

**EDUCATIONAL/HISTORICAL**

Drive south to the **Maya ruins of Tulum** for a “fascinating glimpse of an ancient culture.”—TripAdvisor Member, Maryland

**Maya Ruins, Carretera Cancun-Tulum, Km. 133**

Visit **Xel-Ha**, an “AMAZING natural park” just south of Playa, for water activities, as well as educational tours on the region’s natural history and Maya culture. It’s “wonderful—the water, the fish, the organization. Everything is just perfect!”—TripAdvisor Member, Aveiro, Portugal

Xel-Ha, Carretera Chetumal-Cancun, Km 240, 998 884 7165

**Take a drive north to Cancun, where you can immerse yourself in Mexico’s culture and history, from the Museo INAH to a Mexican rodeo.**

**Museo INAH, Retorno del Rey, Cancun, 998 883 0305**

**TOP 10 Attractions**

1. **Rancho Baaxal**, Maroma Beach, 984 145 8962
2. Epicurean Chef Services, 984 144 4753
3. **The Jungle Place**, One hour south of Cancun, 984 116 9777
4. Sabai Spa, Hotel Jardin de Marieta, 5th Avenue, 984 155 1241
5. Veronica’s Massage, 5th Avenue and Constituyentes, 984 155 1242
6. Xcaret Eco Theme Park, Blvd. Kukulcan, Km. 9.5, Hotel Zone, 998 883 0470
7. Playacar Golf Club, Paseo Xaman-Ha, s/n Mz. 26, 984 873 4990
8. Boca Paila, Yucatan Peninsula, 998 892 1200
10. 5th Avenue (Avenida 5)

**RELAXATION**

“**Grab a cab and take yourselves to the tiny town of Puerto Morelos!** It’s south of Cancun about 17 miles or so. GREAT town, really laid-back, cobblestone streets, beautiful old architecture, small cafes and great restaurants.”—TripAdvisor Member, Connecticut

“If you’re interested in horseback riding and want horses that are well taken care of and knowledgeable staff that cares about the environment, **Rancho Baaxal** is the place. What a gorgeous, peaceful ride through the jungle and along the most amazing beach. I would love to do this again!”—TripAdvisor Member, San Pedro, Belize

**Rancho Baaxal**, Maroma Beach, 984 145 8962

The course at the **Golf Club of Playacar** is “fairly long, nicely manicured and pretty tight, with jungle lining the sides of most holes.”—TripAdvisor Member, Anahuac, Texas

**Golf Club at Playacar, Paseo Xaman-Ha, s/n, Mz. 26, Lote 1, Fraccionamiento Playacar, 984 873 4990**

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“There are shuttle buses at the airport. I would not rent a car simply because Playa del Carmen is a pretty small town. I took cabs when I went a bit out of town.”—TripAdvisor Member, Montreal, Quebec

If you do rent a car, “driving is not difficult, but make sure to learn the words for the traffic signs.”—TripAdvisor Member, Bellingham, Mass.

With the Jungle Maya Expedition, you’ll “kayak off the beach to a lovely lagoon, then have a small snack.” Then you’ll be driven “across rough terrain, into a small underground river or cenote.” You’ll take a “short hike to a larger cenote that has a small but lovely cave system, then eat lunch. Lastly, you’ll stop to drop off your snorkel gear and will be thanked with a shot of tequila.”—TripAdvisor Member, British Columbia, Canada

Jungle Maya Expedition, Sea Monkey Business, 984 803 0809

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WHERE to eat

FAMILIES

La Vagabunda “featured a very nice breakfast. One breakfast, appropriately called the ‘Kiddo,’ was just the right size for my daughter and included delicious chocolate milk.”—TripAdvisor Member, Gladstone

La Vagabunda, Avenida Quinta between Calles 24 y 26, 984 873 3753

Ah Cacao is a chocoholics dream. Rich spicy Mexican chocolate in pastries, ice cream and drinks. Try the Chocolate Maya, the chocolate equivalent of espresso. And the brownies—to die for!”—TripAdvisor Member, Playa del Carmen

Ah Cacao, Avenida Quinta and Constituyentes, 984 803 5748

For an unusual dining experience, eat at Cueva del Chango, “the Cave of the Monkey. Worth seeing if just for the jungle garden setting. How many restaurants have a restroom with a waterfall for a sink?” —TripAdvisor Member, Playa del Carmen

Cueva del Chango, Calle 38 at Avenida Quinta, 984 147 0271

ROMANCE

Byblos is “so romantic! This adorable French bistro is decorated all in white, with little white lights and candlelight. The food was amazing, and our waiter was very attentive but not intrusive. The prices were consistent with the quality of food and service.”—TripAdvisor Member, Connecticut

Byblos, Calle 14 entre 5 y 10 Avenida, 984 803 1790

Mosquito Blue “could be the best restaurant ever! Very upscale in ambiance and menu selection, yet the prices were unbelievably low. The setting is pristine white, with the most elegant touches. We could not have asked for a better place to dine.”—TripAdvisor Member

Mosquito Blue, Avenida Cinquo, 984 873 1245

“The food, the service and the ambiance at Cocina 38 were wonderful. The menu was top quality and varied, and the desserts were so good I had two of them! It’s off the beaten path in Playa, but well worth it.”—TripAdvisor Member, Guatamala City, Guatamala

Cocina 38, 5th Avenue and 38th St., 984 873 0655
WHERE to eat

BUDGET

El Oasis Mariscos is “generally regarded by many locals as having simply the best shrimp tacos in town!”—TripAdvisor Member, Playa del Carmen

El Oasis Mariscos, Calle 12 between Avenidas 5 and 10, 984 803 4451

For the freshest seafood, eat right at the beach! Tarraya “is a quiet place and the fish/seafood is fresh. Beer’s cold and great, scenery’s great, guacamole’s great, salsa’s hot...and great and the prices are very reasonable.”—TripAdvisor Member

Tarraya Restaurant and Bar, Calle 2 Norte, 984 873 2040

“Beer’s cold... salsa’s hot”

“For Mexican food,” try Carboncitos. “The pastor tacos—wooow! And the different salsas with chips, and the cheese cake, and the guacamole. You need to try this place!”—TripAdvisor Member, Madrid, Spain

Carboncitos, Calle 4 between Avenidas 5 and 10, 984 873 1382

HEALTH-CONSCIOUS

Try the vegetarian dishes and salads at the local chain 100% Natural, where you can eat in the rainforest garden patio. The food is “really fresh, top quality and healthy.”—TripAdvisor Member, Lynn, Mass.

100% Natural, Avenida Quinta near Calle 10, 998 873 2242

Meat-free dishes and salads tempt vegetarians at Babe’s Noodles and Bar, although fish and meat are also served. It’s “one of the most popular restaurants in Playa, featuring Thai food with a Swedish influence, e.g., red curry shrimp poured over mashed potatoes! Try the Swedish Meatballs and the gigantic blueberry margaritas for a real treat.”—TripAdvisor Member

Babe’s Noodle Bar, 10th St. between Avenidas 5 and 10, 984 120 2592

Ajua!Maya is “a popular restaurant that serves local Maya dishes. Great atmosphere—the wait staff is very entertaining, and there’s live music nightly. High-quality food and service.”—TripAdvisor Member

Ajua!Maya, Calle 4 entre 5 Av. y 10 Av., 984 873 2523

HIDDEN GEMS

“If you want to support a true local restaurant and enjoy delicious food, La Bamba Jarocha is the place to go: succulent, tasty ceviche, wonderfully fresh fish and the staff was so friendly!”—TripAdvisor Member, Chicago, Ill.

La Bamba Jarocha, Calle 36

“Stray from the main square and you’ll find Piccolina’s, where you’ll be rewarded with extremely tasty and authentic Mexican food at a fraction of the cost you’d spend in the touristy places. Everything we tried there was delicious. This is the type of place where locals go and where you’ll experience your best meal in Mexico.”—TripAdvisor Member, Chicago, Ill.

Piccolina’s, Ave. Rojo Gomez, Puerto Morelos

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Carboncitos, Calle 4 between Avenidas 5 and 10, 984 873 1382

“Bring a big appetite.”

“Not your traditional tourist spot, El Fogón is where hungry locals eat. This is a grill featuring steaks, sausage pork chops and chicken. They are famous for their el pastor tacos. Bring a big appetite. Cheap and good.”—TripAdvisor Member

El Fogón, Three locations: 30th Ave. near Calle 4, 30th Ave. near Calle 32 and Constituyentes near 30th Ave.
FAMILIES

“The Gran Porto Real was the perfect resort for my family. The kids’ activity center was amazing. The staff who work there were fabulous.”—TripAdvisor Member, Cleveland, Ohio
Gran Porto Real Resort and Spa, Constituyentes No. 1, 984 873 4000

“If you’ve booked Iberostar Paraíso Lindo, congratulations! If not, you should.” This 2008 TripAdvisor Travelers’ Choice Award winner is “superb and faultless.”—TripAdvisor Member, Northumberland, U.K.
Iberostar Paraíso Lindo, Km. 309, Playa Paraíso, 984 877 2800

Iberostar Paraíso del Mar was the "best family vacation. My daughter, aged 10, went to the kids' club and had a great time.”—TripAdvisor Member, Swansea, Mass.
Iberostar Paraíso del Mar, Km. 309, Playa Paraíso, 984 877 2800

ROMANCE

“Petit Lafitte is a quiet and very beautiful place. It has its own private beach as well as a very nice pool where you can relax. The food is excellent and all the staff incredibly helpful and friendly.”—TripAdvisor Member, Milan, Italy
Petit Lafitte, Carretera Cancun - Chetumal, Km. 296, Xcalacoco, 984 877 4000

“We just returned from a stay at Maroma in celebration of our anniversary, and we could not imagine a more perfect, peaceful way to escape from the real world. Everything is first class from the moment they meet you at the airport.”—TripAdvisor Member, Brooklyn, N.Y.
Maroma Resort & Spa, Carretera Cancun Tulum, Km. 51, Solidaridad, 998 872 8200

“Why did we have to leave?”

BUDGET

At the “peaceful” Luna Blue Hotel, the standard room was “small but well worth the cost. The courtyard setting is beautiful and very relaxing.”—TripAdvisor Member, Belize
Luna Blue Hotel & Garden, Calle 26, Avenidas 5 and 10, 984 873 0990

“The room at Hotel Cielo was extremely comfortable and surprisingly quiet. It had big windows and comfortable beds, was spacious and very clean. You can even see the sea from the balcony. Lovely!”—TripAdvisor Member, Tampere, Finland
Hotel Cielo, Calle 4, entre 5ta y 10 Av., 984 873 1277

“Playa Del Karma is a charming and quiet place in the heart of the area. The rooms are clean and the multi-lingual staff made our stay very peaceful.”—TripAdvisor Member, Warsaw, Poland
Playa Del Karma, Av. 15 Norte Lte. 9 entre Calle 12 y 14, 984 803 0272

LUXURY

Combining British colonial ambiance and Mexican-Caribbean style, Royal Hideaway Playacar & Occidental Resorts “is simply unmatched. If there were six-star hotels, this one would have seven in guest service.”—TripAdvisor Member, Guadalajara, Mexico
Royal Hideaway Playacar & Occidental Resorts, Lote Hotelero No. 6, Desarrollo Playacar, 984 873 4500

“My husband and I have been to many nice hotels from large to boutique, but we have never, ever, had service like we did at the Rosewood. This is an exceptional hotel in a perfect location and run by an incredible staff. We were upgraded to an oceanview suite which was to die for: comfortable bed, wonderful shower, roof top plunge pool. Simply perfect.”—TripAdvisor Member, Chicago, Ill.
Rosewood Mayakoba, Ctra. Federal Cancun, 984 875 8000

The Royal Playa del Carmen “is the complete royal treatment all the way! The site, the room, the staff, the food, the beach, the service, the activities, the weather—everything was wonderful. Why did we have to leave?”—TripAdvisor Member, Montreal, Quebec
Royal Playa Del Carmen, Av. Constituyentes 1, 998 881 7340

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Where to STAY

HIDDEN GEMS

“My recent stay at the Xaman Ha Penthouse was fantastic! The condo is extremely spacious and was equipped with everything necessary to make my trip complete. The view was unlike any I’ve seen before. Whether sitting on the large balcony or relaxing by the pool or seaside, the location was outstanding.”—TripAdvisor Member, Illinois

Xaman Ha Grand Penthouse, Fracc. Playacar Fase 1, 847 550 5406

“I can highly recommend the Hotel Casa Ticul. It is very stylish, yet affordable with a small pool and a beautiful roof deck, perfect for breakfast or drinks. The beach is just over the street and within 5-10 minutes by foot, you’re in the bar & restaurant area.”—TripAdvisor Member, Vienna, Austria

Hotel Casa Ticul, 5ta Avenida entre 38 y 40, Zacil Ha, 984 267 3501

“I loved the Blue Pearl. The suites are original, private and silent. The location is so near the beautiful beach that my husband and I could go to swim in the emerald Caribbean every morning before breakfast.”—TripAdvisor Member, Mexico City, Mexico

Blue Pearl Suites, 1a Avenida Norte 331, entre calles 10 y 12, 984 803 2379

“...I could swim every morning before breakfast”

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