

The 10 Best Things to Do in Cancún

(Courtesy of Niesha Davis, SMARTERTRAVEL)

Known as the ultimate party destination for spring breakers, this tourist town by the Caribbean Sea has so much more to offer than flashy nightclubs and overpriced tourist traps. Located in the Yucatan Peninsula, Cancún is a ferry or bus away from well-preserved Mayan ruins like Chichen Itza, impressive cenotes for swimming, as well as a myriad of islands and resort cities.

Go Clubbing

Partying is one of the most popular things to do here and for good reason. Cancún is crawling with bars, lounges, and clubs of all varieties. Located smack dab in the middle of the hotel zone, Coco Bongo is one part nightclub, one part theater show. Think acrobats, samba dancers shimmying about, and Michael Jackson impersonators entertaining the crowd. Choreographed Las Vegas style shows based on Hollywood blockbusters like 300 and The Mask or music of the 1960's, combined with a more traditional dance club vibe make for a night to remember. Laser Hot Bar isn't the biggest or flashiest club, but as the oldest gay bar in Cancún, it's a landmark and a must if you're looking for a quality drag show and an inclusive place to shake it until the early morning.

Temazcal Healing Ceremony

Used by indigenous tribes for thousands of years, this powerful purification ceremony is a perfect way to spend a calm day reflecting. The ceremony, which lasts several hours, can include chanting, meditating, setting intentions, and sweating out toxins in the igloo-shaped lodge which is supposed to represent mother earth. Spirituality Riveria Maya offers rituals every full and new moon, including women's only and LGBTQ experiences, and shamanic cacao ceremonies. Ecotravel Mexico is another reputable company.

Museo Maya

A visit to the Mayan Museum of Cancún is a great way to infuse a bit of culture into your vacation. This well-maintained museum hosts a small number of artifacts native to the Yucatan Peninsula in their three exhibition halls that showcase Mayan history, art, and archeology.

Musa Aquaworld Cancún

Daredevils and strong swimmers, this one is for you. Featuring 500 life-size sculptures, this out-of-the-box museum is unlike anything you've experienced. Take a group tour 30-feet down to the coral-covered sculptures underwater. If you've never scuba dived before, you can book the discover scuba diving program where you'll practice in a pool first, before heading out into the ocean. And if you're anything like me and not trying to do any deep-sea swimming at all, there's always the subsee explorer, a glass bottom boat/submarine hybrid that will allow you to explore the Punta Nizuc Reef (complete with a bilingual guide), having to get wet.

Mercado 28 Flea Market Shopping

Cancún is one of Mexico's most popular tourist destinations, and it has the prices to reflect that. For a bargain, head off-the-beaten path to buy local products, quirky street food, affordable local fare, and souvenirs. There are many deals to be found in this large, maze-like market, but come ready to haggle, as there likely won't be many prices displayed. While you're there, try out some fresh seafood at El Cejas. Located in the middle of the market, the food is authentic and affordable, with large portions. Don't miss the ceviche!

Cenote Azul

Cenote Azul is considered one of the most scenic and beautiful cenotes on the Riviera Maya because of its clear blue water and open-air setting. Located about 20 minutes away from Cancún, no trip to the Yucatan is complete without a trip to this cenote. Many more exist but this one has three watering holes of various depths. Bring your own blankets and food to have a beautiful picnic. If you're not a strong swimmer you can rent a lifejacket at Cenote Azul.

Chichen Itza

Chichen Itza is one of the new Seven Wonders of the World, and a must-do on any trip to Cancún. This well-preserved Mayan city spans four miles of archeological, manmade, ancient ruins, including the El Castillo pyramid—you know, the one you see in all the travel photos. Located a two-and-a-half-hour drive, from the city, you'll want to get out there early to beat the heat and the crowds. Many companies offer tours, and they're usually an all-day type of thing, some even including a stop to a local cenote.

Lucha Libre Show

Lucha libre is a style of Mexican wrestling that takes the theatrics up a notch by incorporating more aerial wrestling techniques as well as a colorful style of dress and costume. Luchadores, as they are known, don colorful masks (some with images of different spirits, animals, or characters). A spectacle in the best way possible and fun for everyone, sometimes crowd-goers are encouraged to wear their own masks as they cheer for their favorite wrestler.

Taco Tour

El Polilla is known for their moisty, juicy pork tacos and huge portions. And for about 20 pesos per taco, it makes for a cheap and filling lunch (they close around 2). Sample the best cuisine in town on a trip with Cancún Food Tours, which will introduce you to local gems like El Polilla and Pink Coconut for tacos vegana and almond milk-based peanut butter smoothies.

Hit the Beach

Warm weather and some of the most gorgeous white sand beaches draw visitors back to Cancún time and again.

It's hard to pick a favorite beach when there are so many great ones, but Playa Delfines (Dolphin Beach) remains one of the most popular beaches in the area thanks to its natural vibe, due to lack of hotels and big businesses built on the waterfront.