

## FACTS &amp; FIGURES



**Location:** Yucatán Peninsula México, Caribbean Sea

**Total Area:** 50,843 km<sup>2</sup>

**Coastline:** 865 km

**Climate:** Semi-Tropical

**Population:** 874,963 (2000)

**GDP:** US\$2.2bn (2004) Average Growth 5.9%

**Municipalities:** Benito Juárez, Cozumel, Felipe Carrillo Puerto, Jose M<sup>a</sup> Morelos, Lázaro Cárdenas, Isla Mujeres, Othón P. Blanco, Solidaridad

## CANCÚN

**Location:** Benito Juárez

**Tourism:** Contributes to over 1/3 of Mexico's tourism generated revenues

## QUINTANA ROO



## Down The Mayan Way

Seasoned travellers to Mexico know that the country offers many different and astonishing experiences, yet Quintana Roo remains its most visited state. Now fully recovered from Hurricane Wilma, resorts like Cancun, the Riviera Maya and Cozumel keep updating their attractions.

In the 1960's it became increasingly evident to the world that tourism was a great earner of foreign currency and a good way to kick start any local economy. Mexico already had Acapulco, but suddenly it noticed that all the way across the country in the Yucatan peninsula there was simply pure magic: the ancient world of the Mayas, with their subterranean rivers and caves, their sugary beaches, the second largest coral reef in the world bathed by the crystalline waters of the Caribbean.

Quintana Roo existed then only as a territory, but it became a state in 1974. The official project to develop Cancun, an unspoiled strip of island between the sea and a lagoon, had been approved 5 years earlier. The plan foresaw a road from the little fishing village to Puerto Juarez, the construction of a hotel complex with marinas and golf courses and an area for permanent residents. Finally, the construction of an airport was also approved. The same year that Quintana Roo became a state,

Cancun became part of the municipality of Benito Juarez. Large sums of money were spent on infrastructure and they paid off: Cancun is now the most important destination in Mexico and the most prosperous city in the peninsula. It is more visited than either Bahamas or Puerto Rico, and not even Hurricane Wilma, which kept Cancun in its eye for over 50 hours in October 2005, could dim the appeal of Mexico's best known resort.

The birth of Cancun opened the eyes of a thriving tourist trade to the no less stunning attractions of the

rest of the state. Quintana Roo, named after a warrior-poet who oversaw the birth of the Mexican constitution, is over 50,000 square meters of beaches, lagoons, underwater rivers, white sand beaches and world class archeological sites. Nowadays Playa del Carmen, the center of the Riviera Maya, rivals Cancun in popularity and is the fastest growing city in Mexico.

The appearance of different resorts within the state is the result of a government plan called Proyecto Gran Vision 2025. "This project aims to ensure that all the towns of Quintana Roo will have the necessary resources to be prepared for the massive development which the region will undergo in the next 20 years,"

**"The towns of Quintana Roo will have the necessary resources to be prepared for the massive development which the region will undergo in the next 20 years."**

Félix González Canto, Governor of Quintana Roo



Félix González Canto, Governor of Quintana Roo. The success of Cancun and Playa del Carmen has allowed the authorities to become more ambitious about their plans for the state. With its natural and historical attractions, difficult to match anywhere, Quintana Roo only needs to keep adding upscale services to firmly enter the world of high-end tourism. "Quintana Roo will experience a diversification of the tourist product as a whole," says Canto, "in spas, golf courses and convention centers." New roads, hospitals and an airport between Tulum and Playa del Carmen will further develop the infrastructure.

Residential condominiums like Puerto Cancun, Novo Cancun and Playa Mujeres will give Cancun a new image and attract higher end tourism, apart from the students and backpackers who easily make their way there in charter flights during Spring Break.

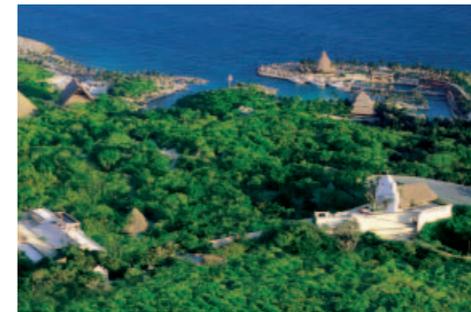
The Riviera Maya, a great stretch going down highway 307 from Punta Brava in the north and veering off to Punta Allen, is

key to the plan for development of the state. The combination of pristine nature in the national park of Sian Ka'an, the oceanfront ruins of Tulum as well as other vestiges of Mayan civilization and the sea are turning the Riviera into the fastest growing tourist destination in the country. "We are consolidating a very rich tourist product," says Darío Flota, the Director of the Riviera Maya Tourism Board. "There will be a wide variety of hotels and prices, and business and convention tourism will also experience tremendous growth."

The Board's latest slogan for the Riviera is *Paradise Forever*, and Flota is aware that for it to keep luring visitors the utmost care must be taken with the ecological aspect of the region: the subterranean rivers, the cenotes (underground natural pools) and the forests. "Development here has heavy restrictions and all of the large resorts and developments have maintained their natural environment and forests that surround them, this way visitors really feel that they are disconnected from the outside world."



Swimming with dolphins in Cozumel Island. Visitors can also explore eco-adventure parks such as Xcaret and Xel-Ha.



Much like their descendants, the Mayans certainly had an eye for where to build. Perched on the edge of a cliff overlooking an emerald sea, the ruins of Tulum are impeccably kept. Here tourists and the locals may stand marvelling at the mathematical precision of Mayan architecture from a central spot in the main square. Long stretches of sand below, on either side, are lined with hotels which will grant you the unique experience of sipping your margarita at night while perhaps musing on how much astronomy was discovered from those ruins by a civilization long gone.

Playa del Carmen will offer you one of the best places on the coast from which to dive and snorkel to discover the stunning Great Mayan Reef, the second largest in the world. Diving centers offer equipment and night diving to the reefs, where the most spectacular underwater sites are to be found and over 500 species of fish can be observed. A relatively small village only a decade ago, Playa del Carmen is now a bustling resort with its own 5th Avenue (Quinta Avenida) a pedestrian mall which is popular for its restaurants, bars and shops. Quieter and wilder spots in the Riviera,



Cave diving in The Riviera Maya.

like Solidaridad, boast boutique hotels such as the Maroma Resort and Spa, a part of the Orient Express Group.

Ten percent of the extension of Quintana Roo is covered by the bio reserve of Sian Ka'an. It harbors almost all of the eco-systems of the state, and is best visited with a local guide. Jungles, swamps, reefs, cenotes, lagoons, two great bays and an impressive array of fauna and flora, including dolphins, jaguars,

scarlet macaws and tucans, constitute an unforgettable natural experience which culminates with the sight of the ruins of Muylil.

Cozumel is Mexico's only Caribbean island, a 53 km by 14 km coral piece of paradise set in azure waters south of Cancun. Jacques Cousteau first put it on the map 45 years ago when he showed its stunning reefs and marine life in one of his documentaries. Centuries ago, it had a different kind of glamour as a pilgrimage center for women expected to play tribute to Ixchel, goddess of fertility and the moon.

"There are many, many things which make Cozumel particularly attractive," says Municipal President Gustavo Ortega Joaquin. "It's the largest inhabited island in Mexico, it's easy to get to, it's very safe, it has its own personality. But what truly sets it apart is that 90% of the island has not been developed, which means you get amazing nature, amazing beaches, amazing diving."

Cozumel suffered greatly during Hurricane Wilma, which damaged 90% of hotel installations. But the recovery was quick: by November 14th of last year it was receiving the first cruise passengers again. The cruise business is very important to Cozumel, and tourists can enjoy 60 different excursions in the island such as diving, swimming with dolphins, ecological treks, fishing. "We're the number one port of call in the world," says Joaquin. "And we worked tremendously hard to clean up and receive our visitors."

Cozumel has been designated as a pilot municipality for *Agenda 21*, an initiative which focuses on quality standards of tourist destinations. "We are strongly committed to controlling the growth on the island and making sure the density levels do not get out of hand," explains Raul Marrufo, Director of the Cozumel Promotion Board. "We want to preserve the jewel that we have here, and that means finding the right balance. We are always ensuring that the impact of development is minimal. As time goes by, we will recuperate the exclusivity the island once had, creating a stronger economy but with lower density."

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# cancun Better than ever

"Cancun is a miracle. It was once a small fishing town and it is now one of the most sought-after destinations in the world." Félix González Canto, Governor of Quintana Roo

Hurricane Wilma in October 2005 was said to be the worst in the history of the Atlantic Ocean. Yet authorities in Cancun not only quickly recovered from its negative effects, but used them as an opportunity to create an even better tourism product.

"Cancun is a miracle," says Governor of Quintana Roo Felix Gonzalez Canto with a smile. "It's the best example of planned development in Mexico. It was once a small fishing town and it is now one of the most sought-after destinations in the world!"

The white sandy beaches and glorious turquoise waters are only the start of what makes Cancun a complete destination experience. For couples looking for romantic time to reconnect, families in need of a place to spend more time together or girlfriends looking for a fun getaway destination, Cancun, "The Mayan Gold Coast," is the perfect answer.

Cancun has made a tremendous recovery following the damage caused by Wilma last fall. A massive refurbishment of the miles of beach along the Caribbean Sea was recently completed, fully restoring and further beautifying the natural attraction with an even wider distance of sandy beaches. Many of the hotels in Cancun have also taken this time to renovate and upgrade facilities and room amenities, transforming themselves into even more luxurious properties. "We are promoting Cancun as a new product," says Artemio Santos, General Director of the Cancun Convention and Visitors Bureau. "If we can take something positive from Wilma is that it gave us the opportunity to build a whole new destination, but this time with experience."

Beyond the beaches and resorts, Cancun has much for visitors to explore. Lush, tropical jungles full of wildlife and beautiful landscapes surround Cancun, and the options are endless for activities to enjoy and sites to discover: Its seas open up to an underwater

**"We are promoting Cancun as a new product"**

Artemio Santos, General Director of the Cancun Convention and Visitors Bureau

world of snorkeling and diving in Cancun and on Isla Mujeres, a small island located northeast of Cancun. Cancun is also an ecological adventurers' paradise. Visitors can explore eco-adventure parks such as Xcaret and Xel-Ha, biosphere reserve Sian Ka'an, and the underground freshwater caves called cenotes. Recently listed a World Heritage Site by the United



Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), Sian Ka'an contains tropical rainforests, mangroves and marshes as well as a large marine section within the barrier reef.

The Mayan culture can be found throughout Cancun in everything from the friendly people and local artists to delicious cuisine and ancient sites rich in cultural history. The Mayan sites of Tulum, Chichen Itza, Coba and Ek Balam are all less than two hours away and offer visitors a chance to learn about the history of these parts of Mexico and how the Mayan culture began.

For those looking for a bit of relaxation and entertainment, Cancun offers world-class spas, golfing, upscale shopping, international cuisine and outstanding nightlife, all accented by rich Mexican culture and unmatched, courteous service for which the people of Cancun are known. Considered one of the world's great spa destinations, Cancun is home to many spas offering treatments from massages, facials and scrubs to body wraps, manicures and steam baths. Visitors can choose to rejuvenate the body, mind and soul in an oceanside cabana or relax in the traditional "temazcal" steam bath.

In addition to these luxurious treatments and activities, visitors can indulge in unique shopping excursions by choosing from more than 2,000 stores located within the Hotel Zone and downtown area. Shoppers can walk through world-class centers and modern malls for the most stylish designer apparel and accessories, or they can select their own handcrafted souvenirs in open-air flea markets and family-run shops.

With golf courses running along the sea and lagoon, Cancun has become a popular destination for golfers with courses designed by golf greats such as Jack Nicklaus, Greg Norman and Nick Price. The golf course landscapes include views of the beaches, sea, rainforests and Mayan remains, and the destination will host the first Professional Golf Association (PGA) tournament in Mexico at the El Camaleon Mayakoba in February 2007.

Whether visitors are looking for a relaxing vacation or one filled with adventure and exploration, Cancun has endless possibilities for each. Families, couples and friends can enjoy the beautiful natural scenery and the warming hospitality of the residents at the "Mayan Gold Coast" of Cancun.



Twenty seven thousand eight hundred rooms and another ten thousand coming in the next three years puts Cancun at the level of Miami, Orlando or Las Vegas. The internet company Orbitz recently publicized its research on the most requested destinations, and Cancun came in third place after Rome and London. The Cancun Convention and Visitors Bureau is in charge of promoting Cancun and coordinating efforts between the international tourism industry and the local tourist services. Artemio Santos especially believes in the importance of directing the product towards the prevailing tendencies of alternative and adventure tourism. There is also room for the growth of convention and congress tourism, now at roughly 13%. "In the next five years our target is to have 30% of our tourism in that segment," says Santos.

**"Cancun is now going through a regeneration of the tourist product, from high end to luxury."**

Francisco Antonio Alor Quezada, President of the Municipality of Benito Juárez

President of the Municipality of Benito Juárez, which includes Cancun. "We are seeing investments in luxury condos, hotels, golf courses and spas, repositioning the destination in the high end market segment."

Cancun has two quite different areas, Ciudad Cancun on the mainland (also called simply "downtown"), which acts as the service center of the hotel industry, and the Hotel Zone or Zona Hotelera, the long, thin strip of sand where the resorts and condos lie, between the wide lagoon and the sea. In terms of urban development, Quezada's priorities are to keep investing in roads, avenues and infrastructure to make Cancun even

more attractive to the discerning traveller. The project of Malecón Cancun will effectively create a new city center extending from the lagoon, with cultural centers and new buildings. "The city has so much more to offer," adds Quezada. "And we will achieve that."

## Much more of a good thing

*Working hand in hand with local and federal authorities, the Hotel Association is one of the driving forces behind the creation of the new, improved Cancun.*

On October 2005 Cancun was hit by Hurricane Wilma. It was a powerful hurricane, yet there was no huge calamity here, as there was with Katrina in the United States.

Thanks to the effective coordination of the municipality, the federal government and the Hotel Association, there were no injuries or fatalities. A phase of prevention, during which the population was constantly informed, was an essential element in ensuring its safety. As many tourists as possible were evacuated back to their homelands and those who remained were taken to safe places until the storm had abated. The hotels responded efficiently to the crisis, assigning members of their personnel to care for the tourists, providing food, hygiene products and even entertainment.

"I think that Wilma actually helped us accelerate those aspects that needed updating in terms of service and quality," says Jesus Almaguer, President of the Hotel Association. "Historically I don't think that there is any destination in the world that has managed to renew itself in the way that Cancun has."

The recuperation was made through the coordination of the authorities, but above all by the strength and drive of the people. "I think

we differentiated ourselves in this type of crisis because our people put their hearts into the clearing up. The solidarity and communal efforts of the people, the federal and local authorities and the tourists themselves enabled us to coordinate a successful response," says former Mexican Minister of Tourism Rodolfo Elizondo.



Five days after the hurricane some hotels were already open. By December 12,000 hotel rooms were in working order and tourists were arriving again. A huge marketing campaign was launched to let tourists know Cancun was back in business. The Cancun Convention and Visitors Bureau sent off 800,000 e-mails to its partners in tourism and other organizations around the world, to inform them about how the reconstruction was progressing. July 2006 found 90% of the hotels open again with the remaining 10% scheduled to reopen in the fall. The challenge of renewing Cancun's world-class attractions, dining, shopping and entertainment has been met. Cancun is now focused on future development of this spectacular destination.

"As a leader in the hotel sector in Cancun I am often asked when Cancun will go back to its former self," says Almaguer. "I always answer that it will never be the same because it's better than ever. The destination is completely renewed and tourists visiting us will experience everything brand new, from beaches to restaurants to hotel rooms."

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H. Ayuntamiento de Benito Juárez



## City within a city

*Puerto Cancun, a landmark private real estate development strategically designed within the city of Cancun will bring a marina, luxury homes and a cosmopolitan lifestyle into the reach of those seeking a home in the Mexican Caribbean.*

Cancun needed a marina, and it's about to get one, together with a 800 acre real estate development that will raise the bar as far as development in the Mexican Caribbean. Puerto Cancun, being touted as a "city within the city", will be a US\$ 150 million private residential, sporting and resort enclave situated on the water's edge next to downtown Cancun.

"I think the most important feature of the project is the marina and how it is integrated into the residential and commercial component," says Ryan Lipp, Senior Director of Sales of Puerto Cancun. "The objective with the marina is to attract the mega-yacht market of South Florida and the West Caribbean to Cancun."

Lipp goes on to explain that the type of lifestyle being created in Puerto Cancun has a very nautical feel: each residence being built on the water has the unique capacity of having a private pier for a boat. The marina, the largest in the Mexican Caribbean, has 300 slips in the main area and an additional 300 where the homes are being built. An outdoor shopping mall or commercial area and boardwalk have been developed around it to create an ambience evocative of the French Riviera.

Puerto Cancun is looking for end users, people who are going to live or have a residence here, whether the whole year or only a part of it. Two thousand one hundred condominiums and 435 residences are being developed with a business park to give service that range from dentists to lawyers. For yacht owners on a visit or tourists there will be 4,000 additional five-star hotel rooms. An 18-hole championship



golf course designed by Tom Weiskopf will be public, within a club house in the marina.

Following the damage wreaked by Hurricane Wilma, safety is an issue for the developers of Puerto Cancun. Its position in the Bay of Isla Mujeres, across from the island, acts as natural protection from wave surge. Another safeguard is that streets and homes will be 2.5 meters above sea level and not even Wilma has reached a surge that high. Constructors are being advised to build using hurricane proof windows.

To own a home in Puerto Cancun could be the ideal investment because a beachfront or waterfront property here, while now at a fraction of the cost in the United States, is bound to rise as Cancun rates higher and higher as a destination. "I think in fact that Puerto Cancun will help shift the focus of Cancun as a destination," continues Lipp. "Instead of being the Spring Break destination or the party center, it will be a high end destination."



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