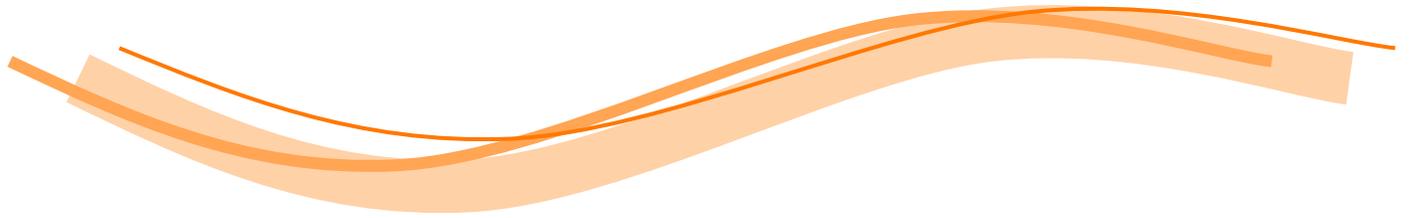




EXCELLENCE RESORTS & TRANSAT HOLIDAYS





EXCELLENCE RESORTS

Experience the finest all-inclusive luxury at Excellence Resorts, the Caribbean's premier adults only resort group. These five-star properties cater to your every need - so you are free to create the moments you dream of, and the memories you'll have forever, in a world of romance and tranquility.

Excellence properties are located in the most exquisite spots in the Caribbean and provide the very definition of a romantic getaway for two. Discover gourmet cuisine, transforming spa treatments, stunning accommodations and stellar service – together with the sense of escapism that an adults-only resort can offer. Their philosophy is one of total wellness and a vacation wrapped in 5 star luxury, personal attention and unparalleled comfort.

Transat Holidays offers daily flights direct to the Dominican Republic and Mexico plus all three of the Excellence Resorts:

- Excellence Playa Mujeres, contemporary luxury at the hot new destination of Playa Mujeres, north of Cancun in Mexico's Yucatan
- Excellence Riviera Cancun, classic luxury on the Riviera Maya
- Excellence Punta Cana, island luxury in the Dominican Republic

The two Excellence Resorts in Mexico are part of Transat Holiday's Luxury Collection - their finest 5 star resorts offering discerning travellers upscale vacations with state-of-the-art spas, gourmet dining and elegant surroundings. When you book a resort in the Transat Luxury Collection you receive special VIP privileges to create "vacationing at its finest":

- Upgrade to Air Transat Option Plus or CanJet Select service on your flights
- Private transfers to the hotel
- Luxurious room with whirlpool or hydromassage bathtub
- Gourmet dining with unlimited à la carte dining
- Unlimited premium brand drinks
- 24 hour room service
- Bathrobes and slippers in room upon arrival
- Beach towels in room upon arrival
- Concierge or butler service

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| <p>Adults Only</p> | <p>Imagine an adults only universe where all inclusive means all the freedom to celebrate each day your way. No children. No distractions. No interruptions. No demands on your time. Only a stunning Caribbean setting and all inclusive luxury intended to spark simple pleasures, hushed conversations and private moments. The world is your own. It is an adults only oasis that is filled with little hideaways and big possibilities. Time ebbs and flows like the ocean tide. However romance speaks to you, you will find it at all these inclusive resorts on the Riviera Maya, in Cancun and Punta Cana. Indulge in a couples spa massage. Drift away together and emerge feeling rested and renewed. Enjoy a torch-lit dinner for two on the beach. Just the stars, gourmet cuisine and you. Bask in quiet time on a poolside daybed under the shade of a coconut palm. This is the place to lose yourself in a way that only an all inclusive adults resort can do. Whether you are celebrating your first day as husband and wife, a special anniversary or just the grace of the everyday, expect to be treated as though you are our only guests. The minimum age is 18 years and over.</p> |
| <p>Website</p> | <p>http://www.excellence-resorts.com Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/ExcellenceLuxuryResorts?sk=app_190322544333196</p> |
| <p>Spa</p> | <p>Enter the beach resort sanctuary of Miilé Spa at Excellence resorts and indulge in a spa renewal of luxury and rejuvenation. You will be surrounded by the most intense elements in nature--sun, air, earth and water-- and secluded from the stresses of day-to-day living. Miilé is the ultimate retreat where relaxation happens naturally. At Miilé's Caribbean spas in Punta Cana, Riviera Cancun and Playa Mujeres, wellness of mind, body and spirit is at the heart of what we do. Native nutrient-rich botanical and marine essentials work to replenish your inner glow and restore your outer beauty. Using the Miilé touch, our goal is to deliver a memorable experience that embraces the feeling of pure relaxation. Please note: While all guests at Excellence Luxury Resorts have unlimited access to the pools and fitness and sports facilities, additional costs apply to Spa services and treatments. Beauty Centre: Pedicures, manicures, hair salon and facial treatment rooms. Miilé Spa: Hydrotherapy pools, sensation showers, saunas, steam treatments indoor and outdoor wellness treatments State-of-the-Art Fitness: Fully equipment gym, open daily from 6 a.m. – 8 p.m., with classes that include yoga, kick boxing, bicycle tours, stability ball, aqua fitness, total body conditioning and Pilates.</p> |

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| | Spa Amenities: Spa concierge desk, relaxation areas, fruit and juice bars, locker areas and spa boutique. |
| Dining | <p>At Excellence, we know luxury vacations always involve exceptional food. And that's why we offer not just dining options but culinary experiences at our five star hotel restaurants. Each resort has eight different restaurants to choose among. All meals, snacks, alcoholic beverages and soft drinks are included as part of our all inclusive luxury. Wake up to healthy and hearty breakfast buffets accompanied by live music. Lunch in an open-air palapa set above our beautiful pool. Dine under the stars on a romantic terrace with an ocean view. Change it up, mix it up every meal, every day.</p> <p>You'll find a special setting for whatever suits your mood and your palate: adventurous, nouvelle, exotic, comfort or spa cuisine. No reservations required. Be spontaneous.</p> <p>Enjoy dishes from around the globe—Italy, France, the Mediterranean and Asia as well as local favorites and spa menus. Our expert sommeliers are always on hand to help out with the perfect wine pairing. For a cozy meal, room service is available 24 hours a day.</p> |
| Weddings | <p>It's the one day that will resonate with you for the rest of your life. And what could be more romantic than getting married on the beach, overlooking the sparkling Caribbean Sea? The wedding professionals at Excellence Resorts work with you to personalize your ceremony and reception with options you've never imagined. Create a fantasy wedding inspired by the grace and abundance of the tropics.</p> <p>At Excellence Resorts in Cancun, on the Riviera Maya and in Punta Cana in the Dominican Republic, you can choose among three deluxe wedding packages. Our professionals will tailor your luxury wedding to your taste so your big day will be worry-free.</p> |

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| Excellence Riviera Cancun, Riviera Maya | <p>If you have a taste for romance and relaxation, the all inclusive luxury of Excellence Riviera Cancun is waiting to welcome you.</p> <p>Situated on a sugar white sand beach on Mexico's Riviera Maya coast, Excellence Riviera Cancun is a classic all-suite Mediterranean-style resort of stucco, tile and marble.</p> <p>It may be secluded but it's not isolated. Vibrant Cancun, cosmopolitan Playa del Carmen and the ancient Mayan world are all at your doorstep. So much to discover--still, no one would blame you if you lingered at this resort.</p> <p>This adults only world is a tropical fantasy that revolves around six winding pools, the clear Caribbean, well-appointed accommodations...and you.</p> <p>Open yourself up to a world of pampering at Miilé Spa. Experience gourmet cuisine at our eight international restaurants. Take an afternoon</p> |
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| | <p>snorkel...or siesta. Enjoy a yoga class on the beach at sun-up...or a late-night spin on the dance floor in our nightclub lounge. No reservations needed anywhere, no schedules to follow.</p> <p>This resort has been awarded the Traveler's Choice 2011 Award by TripAdvisor and is the highest rated resort in this destination.</p> |
| Location | The resort is directly on the pristine white sand beach of Puerto Morelos on Mexico's Riviera Maya, 36 km from Cancun and just 18 kms from Cancun Airport. |
| Accommodation | 440 suites in 9 buildings nestled among tropical gardens. Swim up suites are also available. |
| Services | Guests can enjoy Miilé's Caribbean spa, a cigar lounge, piano bar and disco amongst other facilities. |
| Dining | The resort offers 8 à la carte restaurants: Indian, Asian, Lobster, Steakhouse, French, Pizzeria, Mexican and Italian. |
| Wellness | <p>Miilé Spa is an oasis of unspoiled beauty nestled among the calming purity of the Caribbean's riches. Here relaxation comes naturally. Treatments begin with the exclusive Marine Wellness circuit consisting a series of water treatments, including aqua massages and a cold plunge pool that provides the perfect prelude to the Hammam, Arab style steam baths.</p> <p>From yoga classes and expert massage to manicure stations and water treatments, Miilé Spa at Excellence Riviera Cancun offers the full range of deluxe spa services and facilities to ensure that your Mayan Riviera stay revolves around total wellness of mind, body and spirit.</p> |
| Activities | <p>State-of-the-art fitness centre</p> <p>Yoga and Pilates classes</p> <p>Water aerobics, water polo and aqua fitness</p> <p>Aerobics</p> <p>Non-motorized water sports</p> <p>Introductory scuba lessons</p> <p>Jogging trails</p> <p>Professional shows and theme nights</p> <p>Tennis</p> <p>Football & Basketball</p> <p>Bicycles & bicycle tours</p> <p>Table tennis</p> <p>Beach football and beach volleyball</p> <p>Darts, board games, archery, air rifle shooting</p> <p>Spanish lessons, dancing lessons and cooking lessons</p> <p>Available for an extra fee:</p> <p>World-class Miilé Spa treatments & beauty salon</p> <p>Shared or private deep-sea sportfishing charters in waters teeming with</p> |

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| | <p>barracuda, grouper and snapper Golf at the Greg Norman-designed Playa Mujeres Golf Club Private tennis lessons taught by an Excellence Riviera Cancun tennis pro Bilingual bicycle tours Deep-water shipwreck dives and shallow night dive tours</p> |
| Privilege Club with Transat | <p>Added benefits:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Butler service • CD/DVD and iPod docking station • Personalized concierge service • Priority reservations for à la carte restaurants • Separate check-in/check-out • 24-hour Privilege Lounge with drinks, wine selection, hors d'oeuvres, snacks, newspapers, DVDs and Internet • Private beach area with waiter service • Beach towels in room • Turndown service • VIP room amenities • Lobster dinner • VIP identification bracelet • Special children's amenities |
| Deals with Transat for 2012 | <p>Free wedding and honeymoon packages available Transat Spa Packages are available Transat Luxury Collection exclusive privileges Flexible stays</p> |

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| Excellence Playa Mujeres, Playa Mujeres | <p>In one of the top tourist destinations of the world, it would be hard to imagine a more dramatic setting than Playa Mujeres in Cancun—an all inclusive oasis situated on an untouched peninsula between the Caribbean and a wetlands preserve.</p> <p>Playa Mujeres brings contemporary luxury to the wilds of the region. Its setting is stunning, reclusive as it is exclusive, on a 3km stretch of powdery virgin white sand. And yet Cancun International Airport is just 30 minutes away. The shopping and nightlife of Cancun even closer. Excellence Playa Mujeres is a romantic adults only resort in a private community that boasts an inland marina and a spectacular Greg Norman signature golf course right on the Caribbean.</p> <p>And that's just the beginning.</p> <p>The world-class Miilé Spa will take your breath away—and your cares. The nine international restaurants will delight you with gourmet dining</p> |
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| | <p>options. And the all inclusive list of activities, on both land and sea, will see to it that you're never bored.</p> <p>This intimate seaside resort of Cancun offers sumptuous rooms and contemporary suites, situated to take advantage of gorgeous views.</p> |
| Location | Situated directly on the beach in Playa Mujeres, approximately 10km from Cancun and 25k from the airport. |
| Accommodation | 450 rooms in nine 4-storey buildings set in lush vegetation |
| Services | <p>All inclusive luxury is in nine romantic restaurants, where dining means gourmet dishes at every meal, premium drinks and no reservations. It's in the all-suite accommodations filled with five-star amenities and 24-hour room service. And it is in the measure of their resort facilities with its 7 pools, world-class spa and daily entertainment. With so much included in your all inclusive stay, you can turn your holiday into a romantic beach getaway, soft adventure excursion, spa vacation or gourmet vacation.</p> <p>Here are the facilities, services and amenities all included and at your fingertips at Excellence Playa Mujeres:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 3km wide white sand beach 7 swimming pools (4 heated in winter), with a collective expanse of 56,000 square feet 4 outdoor Jacuzzis and 5 in-pool whirlpools 9 gourmet restaurants--no reservations required 11 premium-stocked bars with poolside and beachside locations |
| Dining | Nine to choose from: Italian, Mediterranean, Indian, Gourmet, Mexican, Asian, Lobster, French and Steakhouse. |
| Wellness | <p>Miilé Spa in Cancun is an island of relaxation, rejuvenation and renewal. Experience tranquility in one of the luxurious spa suites where you can choose among dozens of treatments--massage, facials, scrubs and wraps--in complete privacy. Miilé Spa features authentic Swedish saunas, Roman caldariums, steam rooms, ice therapy and luxury locker rooms.</p> <p>Or opt for an oceanfront treatment facing the Caribbean with the sounds of the sea to lull you. Their approach to personal pampering features the most extensive hydrotherapy circuit in the Mexican Caribbean. Private relaxation rooms with heated waterbeds provide the perfect bookends to your spa treatments.</p> <p>Together with their expert skin care and hair styling staff, Miilé Spa ensures total wellness of mind, body, and spirit.</p> |
| Activities | When it comes to sports and activities, Excellence Playa Mujeres, is all about delivering choice. Where, when and how often you take advantage is up to you. Some activities, like live entertainment and lessons, change daily and are listed in the Excellence Times newsletter delivered to your room. |

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| | <p>Here are some of the ways you can fill your days and nights....all included at Playa Mujeres:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> State-of-the-art fitness centre Yoga and Pilates classes Water aerobics, water polo and aqua fitness Aerobics Basketball Non-motorized sports Introductory scuba lessons Jogging trails Dancing Professional shows and theme nights Tennis & Football Bicycles & bilingual bicycle tours Table tennis Beach football and beach volleyball Darts, board games, archery, air rifle shooting. Spanish dancing and cooking lessons <p>Available for an extra fee:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> World-class Miilé Spa treatments & beauty salon Shared or private deep-sea sportfishing charters in waters teeming with barracuda, grouper and snapper Dinner or sunset pleasure cruises on a yacht, sailboat or catamaran Golf at the Greg Norman-designed Playa Mujeres Golf Club Private tennis lessons taught by an Excellence Playa Mujeres tennis pro Deep-water shipwreck dives and shallow night dive tours |
| <p>Deals with Transat for 2012</p> | <p>Free wedding and honeymoon packages available Transat Spa Packages are available Transat Luxury Collection exclusive privileges Flexible stays</p> |

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| <p>Excellence Punta Cana, Punta Cana, Dominican Republic</p> | <p>Excellence Punta Cana surrounds you with all-inclusive luxury. Nestled among palm groves on an endless Caribbean white-sand beach, Punta Cana is an adults only resort where everything is taken care of and nothing is left to chance.</p> <p>Here at Excellence Punta Cana, you're always just steps away from the Caribbean Sea and pools that wind through the grounds. Experience gourmet dining options at eight international restaurants. And pamper yourself at Miilé Spa, a relaxation garden for wellness and renewal. This classic colonial-style hideaway is just 60kms from Punta Cana International Airport . But worlds away from the demands of the everyday.</p> |
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| Location | Beachfront in the Uvero Alto area of Punta Cana. |
| Accommodation | 452 spacious rooms in several three storey buildings amidst landscaped grounds. Excellence Club Junior Suite and Excellence Club Honeymoon Suite also available with Excellence Club Upgrade Excellence Suite, Swim Up Junior Suite, Master Suite also available |
| Services | All inclusive luxury is in eight romantic restaurants, each one a culinary experience. Enjoy access to any—or all--of the following services and amenities included in your stay at Excellence Punta Cana: Secluded cinnamon sand beach 2 enormous swimming pools 2 outdoor Jacuzzis 8 international restaurant options--no reservations required 10 bars including poolside and beachside 24-hour room service Pool and beach waiter service |
| Dining | Eight restaurants including Mexican, Mediterranean, Italian, Asian, Pizzeria, Seafood, Steakhouse and French. |
| Casino | This resort also features an in-house casino. |
| Activities | Relaxation is in. Boredom is out. And that's why you'll find activities to stimulate mind and body. Activities and entertainment options change daily. Here's a sampling of the sports and leisure activities included in your Excellence Punta Cana stay: State-of-the-art fitness centre Yoga and Pilates classes Water aerobics, water polo and aqua fitness Squash Basketball & Bocce Aerobics Non-motorized water sports Beach volleyball and beach football Baseball pitching machine Tennis & Grass mini-golf Introductory scuba lessons Jogging trails Professional shows and theme nights Bicycles & bicycle tours Table tennis & Billiards Spanish, dancing and cooking lessons Darts, archery and Air rifle shooting Horseback riding - 30 min. included per person per stay |
| Deals with Transat for 2012 | Free wedding, anniversary and honeymoon packages available Transat Spa Packages are available Flexible stays |

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| <p>TRANSAT HOLIDAYS VACATIONS WITH EXCELLENCE RESORTS</p> | <p>Transat Holidays offers daily flights direct to the Dominican Republic and Mexico plus all three of the Excellence Resorts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Excellence Playa Mujeres, contemporary luxury at the hot new destination of Playa Mujeres, north of Cancun in Mexico's Yucatan ■ Excellence Riviera Cancun, classic luxury on the Riviera Maya ■ Excellence Punta Cana, island luxury in the Dominican Republic <p>The two Excellence Resorts in Mexico are part of Transat Holiday's Luxury Collection - their finest 5 star resorts offering discerning travellers upscale vacations with state-of-the-art spas, gourmet dining and elegant surroundings.</p> <p>Ask your travel agent for the Transat Holidays Sun Collection 2012 brochure and go to www.transatholidays.com</p> |
| <p>Transat Background</p> | <p>Transat A.T. Inc. is an integrated international tour operator with more than 60 destination countries and that distributes products in over 50 countries. A holiday travel specialist, Transat operates mainly in Canada and Europe, as well as in the Caribbean, Mexico and the Mediterranean Basin. Montreal-based Transat is also active in air transportation, destination services and distribution. (TSX: TRZ.B, TRZ.A)</p> <p>Transat is now the largest tour operator in Canada, and is at the core of the vertical integration process developing and marketing vacation products as well as flights to destinations in the South and Europe. The company acts as a master craftsman in assembling different components of leisure travel: air transportation, passenger transfers from airport to hotel, accommodation, recreational and cultural activities, meals, cruises, and much more.</p> <p>Year-round, Transat Holidays provides its customers across Canada with a full range of holiday products. It offers sun vacations, with a choice of more than 140 hotels, mainly in the Caribbean, Mexico and Florida, along with an impressive array of flights, packages and tours to some 30 European destinations. Transat Holidays also offers more than 100 cruises all around the world.</p> <p>As an industry leader, Transat Holidays offers departures from many Canadian cities including: St-John's, Halifax, Moncton, Fredericton, Montréal, Québec, Ottawa, Hamilton, Toronto, Thunder Bay, Regina, Saskatoon, Winnipeg, Calgary, Edmonton, Lethbridge, Vancouver, Victoria, Comox, Abbotsford, Prince George and Kelowna (as at 2012). Website: http://www.transat.com/en</p> |
| <p>Mission</p> | <p>Transat Holidays offers quality vacation packages to a wide variety of destinations. Each season, the company presents a wide selection of quality products, in order to meet the diversified needs of Canadian travellers. In keeping with their mission, their employees aim to exceed vacationers' expectations in order to maintain their position as a market</p> |

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| | leader. They see their role, ultimately, to turn holiday dreams into reality: making the vacation experience one of the most memorable ever. |
| Products | Packages, Cruises, Hotels, Flights, Tours, Car Rentals & Train Travel. With a choice of over 300 hotels located in more than 50 destinations and a complete line of itineraries offered in partnership with the most prestigious cruise lines, all products offered by Transat Holidays are subject to a rigorous standard review. |
| 2012: Transat's 25th Anniversary | In 2012, Transat is celebrating its 25th Anniversary with a silver lining, giving travellers a reason to celebrate! To kick off the New Year, Transat Holidays is unveiling exciting promotions that salute the number 25. Canadians who book a vacation from January 6 to 31, 2012 will automatically have the chance to pay only \$25 for their booked vacation! Every day during this time period, the company will randomly draw one reservation booked the previous day, and the daily winner will pay only \$25 of its vacation! The promotion applies to new bookings of roundtrip flights, packages, cruises or tours to Sun destinations or Europe for travel between January 9 and October 31, 2012. The company will also feature special anniversary offers at great prices for vacation destinations booked from January 6 to 31, 2012. |
| Win a trip to the Dominican Republic! | There are an additional 5 Transat Holidays trips to the Dominican Republic to be won! Visit www.MyGetawayMyWay.com to answer a few questions and the Transat compass will point you in the direction of YOUR perfect destination in the Dominican Republic. Best of all, you will have a chance to win your perfect vacation! |
| Wider Seats | Air Transat has added more legroom on all their aircraft, making the journey to and from your destination even more comfortable. |
| Air Transat Upgrades | Air Transat has introduced its new Economy Class meal service on sun destination flights. As part of its ongoing efforts to provide clients with the best possible service, Air Transat has upgraded its onboard service. Passengers flying south will now be welcomed onboard with a glass of champagne, while early morning passengers will be greeted with a mimosa. The meal service has also been improved. The airline will now offer passengers a more complete meal tray, including a choice of two hot meals, a complimentary glass of wine and dessert. |
| Awards | Agent's Choice Awards: Transat Holidays ranked number one for three years in a row by Canada's travel agents according to the results of the Agents' Choice Awards, a survey carried out by Canadian Travel Press and Travel Courier. |
| Current Brochure | Transat Holidays Sun 2012 and Nolitours Sun 2012 brochures are available at your local travel agent and cover vacations through to October 2012. |
| Air Transat Kids | To ensure that your family vacations are fun and unforgettable from |

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| <p>Club</p> | <p>beginning to end, Air Transat has created Kids Club so that young passengers can really enjoy themselves while onboard an Air Transat flight. It is designed to make air travel a fun experience for young travellers (and for their parents!). Even before the doors of the plane are closed following boarding, every child receives a small bag containing all sorts of surprises and games. The more fun they have, the easier the flight. Furthermore, children who are members of Air Transat Kids Club enjoy certain exclusive privileges.</p> <p>Members of the Air Transat Kids Club will enjoy several benefits that the whole family can share. You can check in at a special "Air Transat Kids Club Members" counter. Thanks to these special counters located in major Canadian airports where Air Transat flies, checking-in is quicker than before. At check-in, special tags will be placed on your baggage; as a result, your baggage gets priority treatment.</p> |
| <p>Transat Club Class</p> | <p>Enjoy exclusive privileges such as complimentary seat selection, wider, more comfortable leather seats, a choice of gourmet meals and fine wines, priority check-in, baggage service and boarding.</p> <p>Club Service</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dedicated Club attendants • Attentive, personalized service • Exclusive, spacious Club cabin <p>Drinks & Snacks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome cocktails • Complimentary non-alcoholic drinks, snacks and bar service <p>Club Privileges</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased baggage allowance • 40 kg checked/15 kg carry-on • Exclusive, rapid check-in counter in most airports • Priority boarding • Practical travel items (on Europe flights) • Free headsets • Canadian newspapers <p>Comfort & Refinement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wider, more comfortable leather seats • More leg room • Complimentary Seat Selection: call 1-877-872-6728 • Choice of gourmet meals • Choice of wine and more |
| <p>Option Plus</p> | <p>This Economy class option includes many priority privileges and services including priority check-in, priority baggage handling, an extra 10kg baggage allowance and even champagne. Here's what you get:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advance seat selection on roundtrip flights • Priority check-in at a dedicated counter • Priority baggage handling |

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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Priority boarding • Complete Air Transat travel kit on flights to European destinations • Snacks from the On Board Bistro selection • Alcoholic beverages during drinks service 200ml bottle of champagne (Sun and Europe) • Supplementary baggage allowance up to 10 kg per flight segment** • Wine or beer with the meal • Headsets <p>The cost is \$79-\$119 for southbound destinations and \$99-\$209 for European destinations as at January 2012</p> |
| <p>Transat and Sustainable Tourism</p> | <p>Transat recognizes the prime importance of the environment, host communities, cultural diversity, and their relationships with their employees, customers and partners. Tourism has become one of the world's leading industries. Society and communities reap the benefits, and, each year, hundreds of millions of travellers discover new countries and cultures. Transat is firmly committed to the responsible development of the tourism industry, and has adopted the following definition of sustainable tourism:</p> <p>“Sustainable tourism entails respect for nature, as well as for host communities and their values; it combines positive socio-economic benefits for local populations with an enriching experience for travellers.”</p> <p>The issue of the environment, as far as Transat's own facilities are concerned, is a clear and basic target. Their environment committees have implemented concrete initiatives with regard to recycling, conservation of resources, the disposal of obsolete electronic equipment, and raising employee awareness. Air Transat has begun developing an environmental management system that could lead to an ISO 14001 certification in the future. To find out more, consult the Transat and the Environment sections at their website:</p> <p>http://www.airtransat.ca/en/Info/the-environment-its-everyones-business.aspx?ExitID=69&ContentType=voyageur</p> |
| <p>Gift Certificates</p> | <p>Here's your chance to make a loved one's dream come true. With Transat gift certificates you can offer the beauty, excitement, and wonders of the world: the South with its heavenly beaches and endless sunshine, or just a rental car. Transat gift certificates are valid on all Air Transat, Nolitours, or Transat Holidays products in our brochures. They can be redeemed at a travel agent's office at the time of reservation. To order your gift certificates call 1-800-322-6649.</p> |
| <p>2012 Hurricane Policy</p> | <p>Nolitours and Transat Holidays provide you with true peace of mind. Vacationers can now travel secure in the knowledge that they will be protected should a hurricane affect their destination city in Florida, Mexico, the Caribbean or Central America. This Nolitours/Transat Holidays policy covers reservations for departures between June 1 and November 30, 2011 inclusive. If the conditions stipulated in the policy</p> |

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| | <p>are met, clients may choose one of the four options listed below:</p> <p>1. Travel at a later date Travellers who choose to travel at a later date can do so at no additional cost. Travel must be completed on or before December. The dept day, destination city, hotel and room category must remain the same.</p> <p>2. Travel to another destination city Travellers who choose to travel to another destination can do so by selecting another Nolitours/Transat Holidays destination that is not at risk of a hurricane. Travel must take place within four weeks of the original departure date. If the package price is higher than the original booking, the traveller will be responsible for paying the difference.</p> <p>3. Travel to the booked destination city Travellers who want to travel to their initially booked destination may do so, provided Nolitours or Transat Holidays still serves that destination city on the scheduled departure date. No refund will be issued if this option is taken.</p> <p>4. Cancel with a full refund Travellers who choose not to travel may cancel with a full refund (excluding travel insurance premiums already paid).</p> |
| <p>Transat Excursions in Punta Cana</p> | <p>ZIP LINE Soar like a bird over the treetops on the ten different zip-lines in an eco tourist park. The professional and knowledgeable guides will provide you with an unforgettable experience.</p> <p>BAVARO RUNNERS – SAFARI ADVENTURE Discover the Dominican countryside with its traditional villages, mountains and sugar cane plantations. Stops are scheduled for lunch and swimming. Experience the Dominican way of life. Unforgettable!</p> <p>SWIM WITH THE DOLPHINS A once-in-a-lifetime experience and a dream come true... Learn about these amazing mammals as you interact with them!</p> <p>BUGGY EXCURSION Drive your own dune buggy through the Dominican countryside, then stop off to relax or go for a swim. A day to remember!</p> <p>SAONA CATAMARAN – MOTOR BOAT Sail the crystal-clear Caribbean Sea on the catamaran cruise of your dreams. On the way back, experience a thrilling speedboat ride and go</p> |

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swimming in one of the world's most beautiful natural pools!

MARINARIUM

Swim with sharks and stingrays at this unique marine park, the only one of its kind in Punta Cana. A unique experience, not to be missed!

HORSEBACK RIDING

Enjoy a beautiful horseback ride on the beach.

SANTO DOMINGO

Enjoy a cultural and fascinating tour of the capital of the Dominican Republic, the oldest city in the Americas. Visit the first Cathedral of the New World, the Alcazar of Columbus, the Pantheon, the colonial city, and "Los Tres Ojos", the amazing underground caverns.

TROPICAL STORM FULL DAY

Go to a beautiful snorkelling area, enjoy a bath in the natural pool, have a nice lunch on the boat and learn how to dance the bachata and merengue! All this while sailing on a magnificent catamaran along the beautiful Bavaro coast.

TROPICAL STORM SUNSET

Enjoy a beautiful sunset cruise aboard a catamaran, bathe in a natural pool and finish up this magical evening with a lobster dinner in one of the most popular restaurants on the beach.

BUCANEROS – SPEED BOAT

Discover the beautiful turquoise waters aboard your own speed boat. This 3-hour tour will show you the best of this spectacular area.

DEEP-SEA FISHING

Did someone say fishing? We have everything you need for a private fishing trip or a shared charter excursion. An unforgettable experience!

HIGUEY SIGHTSEEING

Visit historic Higuey City, and marvel at magnificent Nuestra Señora de la Altagracia Basilica. Go souvenir shopping in local stores, and finish up this fascinating excursion with a visit to a rum factory located near a Taino cave.

ANIMAL ADVENTURE PARK

Come and visit this unique park, where you get to interact with animals. Become a trainer for a day and work with sea lions. Different animal shows are also available throughout the park.

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| | <p>QUAD EXCURSION This tour will bring out the Indiana Jones in you. Drive your own four-wheeler on the beach and through some breathtaking scenery. Stop at a lovely beach for a refreshing swim. The tour guides will look after you every step of the way.</p> |
| <p>Transat Excursions in Riviera Maya</p> | <p>CHICHEN ITZA Tour the capital of the Mayan Empire, one of the richest ancient cultures in the world. Built in 600 A.D., it was one of the most important ceremonial and religious centres in America. Test the acoustics in the ball court and see the well-preserved artifacts.</p> <p>COBA MAYAN VILLAGE The real Mexican tour! Discover the highest pyramid on the Yucatan Peninsula. Visit a small Mayan village and meet the inhabitants who will show you how they make chewing gum from tree resin.</p> <p>SNORKELLING TOUR This full-day tour will allow you to admire the underwater life of the second largest coral reef in the world. Enjoy lunch at a private beach club, then join in some activities or simply relax on a hammock.</p> <p>ATV Discover the Mayan jungle on your own ATV and experience the thrill of snorkelling in the crystal clear waters of a cenote. A day to remember!</p> <p>CAPTAIN HOOK All aboard – the adventure is about to begin! Enjoy a pirate show as you savour a lobster or steak dinner.</p> <p>SIAN KAAAN BIOSPHERE Depart for the Sian Kaan biosphere. Your guide will take you along a dirt road so you can observe the biosphere’s natural beauty. Then, return to Punta Allen, a small fishing village. Enjoy a leisurely boat ride. You’ll have the opportunity to see dolphins, manta rays, lobsters, sea turtles and many different kinds of birds.</p> <p>XPLOR An all-inclusive adventure! XPLOR is a unique underground world, with activities that let you Xplore and rediscover nature. Come and enjoy zip lines, amphibious vehicles, underground rafts, and a stalactite river swim.</p> <p>XEL-HA AND TULUM Go swimming at Xel-Ha, one of the most beautiful natural aquariums in</p> |

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the entire Mayan Riviera, followed by a tour of Tulum, the only walled Mayan city. Enter the fortress on the west side of the ceremonial city, which still features ancient paintings.

ISLA MUJERES TOUR

Step aboard and sail the crystal clear waters of Isla Mujeres on a brand new 75 ft maxi catamaran. The friendly crew will guide you on an unforgettable sailing and snorkelling experience. Open bar and buffet included.

JUNGLE TOUR

Enjoy one of Transat's most popular and exciting tours. Pilot your own two-person speedboat through the mangroves before snorkelling at Punta Nizuc, part of the world's second-largest coral reef.

NIGHTCLUB TOUR

The fabulous and unique Party Hopper Tour offers 7 hours of open bar with national drinks. Cover and Express Pass (no waiting in line) at the most popular night clubs in Cancun.

RIO SECRETO

Discover the secrets of a real underground river, the longest and most spectacular in the region, and travel on a fantastic journey into a world of extraordinary beauty. A wonderful addition to your Tulum visit.

COBA MAYAN ADVENTURE

A day filled with excitement and adventure! Discover the Yucatan's tallest pyramid. Explore a Mayan village, walk through the jungle and go rappelling, zip lining, swimming in cenotes and canoeing in fresh water lagoons, followed by a delicious traditional meal.

DEEP SEA FISHING

Go on an incredible journey as you live the world-famous deep sea fishing experience. Have a great catch and get the big ones: kingfish, barracuda, snapper, grouper, sailfish, mackerel, mahi-mahi and more. Catch & Release Policy is enforced by the Mexican Marine Fauna.

SWIM WITH DOLPHINS

Make your dreams come true! Get to know these wonderful mammals as you swim and play with them in the water.

JUNGLE MAYA

Discover the world's longest underground river, before snorkelling in the Nohoch Nah Chiich cavern. Then ride through the rain forest in an

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| | all-terrain Mercedes Benz Unimogs to Yaxmuul, a unique natural pool. At Kantenah Natural Reserve go rappelling down a beautiful cenote and zip line over jungle foliage. Then, participate in a traditional Mayan purification ceremony |
| Special Deals with Ocean Resorts | Transat currently has some very special deals with Excellence Resorts this winter: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Free honeymoon packages- Check out their website at www.TransatHolidays.com for latest deals. |

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| RIVIERA MAYA, MEXICO | <p>It starts with a special location - the Riviera Maya is mystical, mesmerizing and magnificent... The Mayan coast is a favourite spot around the world for vacationers seeking beauty combined with Mexican hospitality.</p> <p>The area boasts intriguing Mayan ruins, spectacular scuba diving, eclectic towns & villages and adventurous eco-tour options - not to mention upscale shopping, sizzling nightlife and tantalizing cuisine. Serviced by the Cancun International Airport, the Riviera Maya is a destination not to be missed. Flights are available with Transat from airports right across Canada.</p> |
| Location | Southeast Mexico, facing the Caribbean. |
| Geography | The Yucatán's Caribbean coast is 380km long, stretching from Cancún all the way to Chetumal, at the border with Belize. The northern half of the coast has been dubbed the "Riviera Maya"; the southern half, the "Costa Maya." In between is the large Sian Ka'an Biopreserve. |
| Name | <p>The Mexican name for the Atlantic coastal region of the Yucatan Peninsula is "Riviera Maya", named after the Mayan People. The English use is either Maya Riviera or Mayan Riviera.</p> <p>Cancun comes from "Kankun" (a single word written with the two "k's"), which means "pot of snakes" or "nest of snakes" in Maya.</p> |
| Language | Spanish, but English is widely spoken in the resort areas |
| Currency | One Canadian Dollar = 13 Mexican Pesos (7 th January 2012) |
| Tipping | 10-15% |
| Government | Democracy |
| Documentation | Passports are required for Canadian citizens, but no Visa is necessary. |
| Time zone | Central Time |
| Health | No inoculations needed; drink bottled water to avoid 'turista', an upset stomach. |
| Safety tips | <p>Car break-ins are just about the only crime here. Despite concerns about safety in Mexico which have been largely created by lurid media reporting, Mexican tourist destinations remain as safe as most other major destinations.</p> <p>For instance the murder rate in this part of Mexico – the Yucatan – is the same as the rate in Canada.</p> <p>Mexico's President Felipe Calderon told the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) summit in Las Vegas on May 19th 2011 that the murder rate in Mexico was lower than in much of the US. "The rate of homicide is 15-16 per 1,000 – lower than in Washington DC, in Pittsburgh or in New Orleans," he said. "It is lower than in Puerto Rico. Yucatan has a rate of less than two per 1,000 – similar to places in Europe." The president also suggested the US bore a responsibility for the increasing violence. He said: "There are 8,000 gun shops along the US side of the border with Mexico. We seized more than 100,000 guns from criminals and 85% were bought in the US." A sobering thought...</p> |

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| CLIMATE | |
| General climate | The average annual temperature of the Riviera Maya is 25.5 degrees Celsius, with fluctuations of 5 to 7 degrees. Occasional hurricanes (e.g.Emily and Wilma in 2005) |
| Today's weather | 25 degrees and cloudless (7 th January 2012) |
| Best time to visit | Year round (the hurricane season is July-Nov, but you would be very unlucky to encounter one of these storms) |

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| GETTING THERE | |
| Flying time | 4 hours from Montreal and Toronto |
| Cities and Towns | <p>Cancun Cancun is situated on the south-east coast of Mexico in the state of Quintana Roo in the Yucatan Peninsula. Warm white powdery sand beaches and turquoise crystal clear waters together with the famous Mexican hospitality make this a place like no other.</p> <p>There are a thousand and one things to do in Cancun. There are many world-class luxury hotels dotted all along the edge of the beautiful Caribbean Sea, and on the other side you have the Nichupte Lagoon with many romantic waterside restaurants and trendy bars. Add a full range of water sports, including some of the world's most exquisite snorkeling and scuba diving, plus championship golf courses and you have a location that will delight even the most discerning traveler.</p> <p>For water sports enthusiasts, Cancun offers some of the best scuba diving, snorkeling and fishing in the world, owing to the Great Mesoamerican Reef just off the coast of Cancun. This is the second largest reef in the world – second only to the Great Barrier Reef in Australia.</p> <p>In Cancun you have such a varied choice of cuisine, with everything from downtown traditional Mexican restaurants to ultra-chic bistros. You will find something to suit all tastes and budgets and will get fantastic service with a smile wherever you go. Cancun's Hotel Zone is renowned for its nightlife, boasting some of the best nightclubs in the world playing everything from salsa to disco to R & B and live music venues. You will find something to suit all ages and tastes.</p> <p>Downtown Cancun offers a captivating mixture of tradition and modernity. If you like to enjoy a real local atmosphere in a safe and friendly environment then this is the place to come! In downtown Cancun you will find hotels for all budgets- many small local restaurants offering regional and specialty cuisines and some really cool bars and live music venues. There is a wide choice of shopping venues from the Mercado 28 – a handicrafts market – to the super modern shopping mall Plaza Las Americas.</p> <p>The Cancun Aquarium located near Cancun's hotel zone boasts a</p> |

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large numbers of fascinating Marine life exhibits. There is also an area to get up close to various marine life including star fish and sea cucumbers.

Playa Mujeres – This is a newly developed destination a little to the north of Cancun and features an endless beach, a brand new marina and some luxurious resorts. It's the perfect spot for a quieter vacation but it's still very close to the bright lights of Cancun. The Isla Mujeres is just offshore and makes for a lovely excursion by small boat.

Puerto del Carmen - Playa, as it is called, is the most happening place on the coast - a delightful beach (especially when the wind and currents are flowing in the right direction), hotels for every budget, a good choice of restaurants, and an active nightlife, most of which is on or around Quinta Avenida (Fifth Ave.), Playa's well-known promenade. In the last few years the town has grown quickly, and local residents and the tourism board are working to keep it from becoming a smaller version of Cancún.

Puerto Morelos - This town between Playa and Cancún remains a little village affectionately known by the locals as "Muerto Morelos" (muerto means "dead") for its phenomenally quiet low season. It has a few small hotels and rental houses, and nearby are a few secluded spa resorts. The coast is sandy and well protected by an offshore reef, which means good snorkeling and diving nearby, but the lack of surf means sea grass and shallow water. If you're looking for good swimming, head farther down the coast. If you're looking for a relaxing seaside retreat with a clean beach in an easygoing community, this will work for you.

Puerto Aventuras - The first major town south of Playa is a modern condo-marina development with a 9-hole golf course, several restaurants, and a few hotels. You might come here to go deep-sea fishing or swim with dolphins.

Akumal - A bit farther south is Akumal and Half Moon Bay. The community is relatively old for this shore, which means that it's already built up and doesn't have the boomtown feel of Playa and Tulum. Akumal has a strong ecological orientation and is a prominent scuba and snorkeling center. The locals are a mix of Americans and Mexicans, who enjoy the unhurried lifestyle of the Tropics, making this a good place to relax and work on your hammock technique. There are a few hotels; most of the lodging is rental houses and condos. Consequently, the town is a favorite with families who enjoy the calmness of the place and can save money by buying groceries and cooking for themselves.

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| | <p>Tulum - The town of Tulum (near the ruins of the same name) has a hotel district of about 30 palapa (palm-leaf roofed) hotels, which stretch down the coast of the Punta Allen peninsula. A few years ago it was mainly a destination for backpacker types, but with some of the most beautiful beaches on this coast and many improvements in hotel amenities, it now attracts people with big budgets. Construction is booming, both in the town and along the coast. Here you can enjoy the beach in relative solitude and quiet.</p> |
| Distances | <p>The tranquil paradise of the Mayan Riviera stretches more than 100 km south of Cancun offering stunning beauty with ruggedly beautiful beaches, lush vegetation and a charming Mexican atmosphere.</p> <p>Cancún – Tulúm130 km Cancún – Cobá167 km Cancún – Chichén Itza193 km Cancún – Puerto Morelos ...32 km Cancún – Xcaret72 km Cancún – Xel-Há124 km</p> |
| Ferries | <p>You can take a ferry to Cozumel, which you catch in Playa del Carmen. There are two ferry lines transporting passengers now. The ferries leave every hour. The ride is approximately 45 minutes, depending on the sea conditions \$11</p> <p>The island of Isla Mujeres is located off the coast and is accessible by boat from Puerto Juárez.</p> |
| Car Rental | All major companies are represented here. |
| Buses | A colectivo is a mini-bus that runs up and down the coast along highway 307 from Cancun to Tulum. It is an inexpensive way to travel up and down the Riviera. |

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| ACCOMMODATION TYPES | All Inclusive resorts predominate here, but there are smaller, pension type properties in Playa del Carmen. |
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| LIFESTYLES | |
| Kids | <p>Xcaret is a developed Nature Park, eighty kilometers south of Cancún and 10km south of Playa del Carmen. Xcaret (pronounced "ish-cah-ret") is an ecological and archaeological theme park that is one of the area's most popular tourist attractions. It's the closest thing to Disneyland that you'll find in Mexico, with myriad attractions in one location, most of them participatory. Signs throughout Cancún advertise Xcaret, which has its own bus terminal to take tourists there at regular intervals. Plan to spend a full day.</p> <p>Tres Rios ecoadventure park 25 minutes south of Cancún is actually a nature reserve on more than 60 hectares of land. Tres Ríos (tel.</p> |

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| | <p>998/887-8077 in Cancún; www.tres-rios.com) offers families a beautiful natural area for kayaking, canoeing, snorkeling, horseback riding, or biking along jungle trails. It's definitely less commercial than the other eco-theme parks and is essentially just a great natural area for participating in these activities. The entrance fee - \$22 for adults, \$19 for children - includes canoe trips; the use of bikes, kayaks, and snorkeling equipment; and the use of hammocks and beach chairs once you tire yourself out. Extra charges apply for scuba diving, horseback riding, and other extended, guided tours through the preserve and its estuary. You can also opt for an all-inclusive package that covers admission, diving, horseback riding, and all food and beverages. It costs \$75 per adult, \$62 for children under 12.</p> <p>The ecopark at Xel-Ha (tel. 998/884-9422; www.xelha.com), 13km south of Akumal, attracts throngs of snorkelers and divers with its warm waters and brilliant fish. The beautiful, calm cove is a perfect place to bring kids for their first snorkeling experience. Xel-ha (shell-hah) also offers dolphin swims and has food and beverage service, changing rooms, showers, and other facilities.</p> |
| <p>Teens</p> | <p>In Cancún, the Parque Nizuc marine park offers guests a chance to swim with dolphins and view them in their dolphin aquarium, Atlántida. The price of the dolphin swim (\$135) includes admission to the park. It's a fun place for a family to spend the day, with its numerous pools, waterslides, and rides. Visitors can also snorkel with manta rays, tropical fish, and tame sharks. It's at the southern end of Cancún.</p> <p>Xplor: Xplor is a unique underground world, with four activities that invite you to Xplor and rediscover your emotions and senses immersed in nature. This unique place is found in the heart of the Riviera Maya on the highway to one side of Xcaret. Xplor offers you the chance to dive deep into the entrails of the Earth in way that would previously have been unimaginable, submerging yourself in a sea of stalactites and stalagmites, navigating on an underground raft, after a fantastic flight through the jungle, or like a modern Xplorer, driving an amphibious vehicle that can travel equally on water and underground and also through the intricate paths filled with thick foliage.</p> <p>Selvatica: the adventure kingdom is strategically located in between Cancun and Playa del Carmen (only 30 minutes away from either town). With over 330 acres of jungle, their 3 high-rope circuits including the "Aventura" zipline circuit (11 cables), plus its brand new "Extremo" course (12 ziplines), and America's first A.C.C.T. fully certified Aerial Trek (high ropes course with over 20 elements), Selvatica offers adventures for everyone, from 6 to 96 year olds.</p> |

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| Honeymoons & Weddings | <p>The Riviera Maya is a popular destination for weddings and honeymoons. These are best arranged through the tour operator with the resort itself.</p> |
| UNIQUES | <p>Coba: Set inland, deep in the jungle, surrounded by shallow lakes and accessed by "sac-be's", a network of formal limestone roads built by the Mayans over a 1000 years ago, awaits the ancient city of Coba, located about 25 miles west of Tulum, Coba served as a Ceremonial center that flourished during the Classic Period (300-1000 A.D.), with 50,000 inhabitants. Coba, the capital of the largest Late Classic Empire in the Northern Lowlands, the city's most important structure is the Nohoch Mul, which is the tallest pyramid in the Yucatan Peninsula, stands 138 feet tall. The road to Cobá begins in Tulum and continues for 65km; there are also buses to Coba from Puerto Del Carmen</p> |
| Surprising | <p>Cenotes, or sink holes, can be found all over the Yucatan Peninsula. These sink holes can be several meters deep and lead the explorer to pure, cool, crystal clear water. Their natural beauty and refreshing waters are the reasons why cenote exploring is a favourite local pastime Try www.alltournative.com for a guided trip into a cenote.</p> |
| History | <p>Tulum: A popular excursion combines a visit to the ruins at Tulum with the ecological water park Xel-Ha . A wall surrounds the site on three sides, which explains the name (tulum means fence, trench, or wall). Its ancient name is believed to have been Záma, a derivative of the Maya word for "morning" or "dawn," and sunrise at Tulum is certainly dramatic. The wall is believed to have been constructed after the original buildings, to protect the interior religious altars from a growing number of invaders. It is considered to have been principally a place of worship, but members of the upper classes later took up residence here. Between the two most dramatic structures - the Castle and the Temple of the Wind - lies Tulum Cove. A small inlet with a beach of fine, white sand, it was a point of departure for Maya trading vessels in ancient times. Today it's a playground for tourists, and you can enjoy a refreshing swim. Admission to the site without a tour is \$3.50 168km SW of Cancún</p> <p>Coba: Older than most of Chichén Itzá and much larger than Tulum, Cobá was the dominant city of the eastern Yucatán before A.D. 1000. The site is large and spread out, with thick forest growing between the temple groups. Rising high above the forest canopy are tall and steep pyramids of the Classic Maya style. Of the major sites, this one is the least reconstructed. But the structures themselves and the surrounding jungle and twin lakes make the experience enjoyable. This is not a cenote area, and the water has nowhere to go but stay on the surface. The forest canopy is also higher than in the northern part of the peninsula.</p> |

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| Books | Frommer's Cancun, Cozumel & the Yucatan 2012 Maya Roads by Mary Jo McConahay see my review of this lovely book: http://www.chrisrobinsontravelshow.ca/Planning/ChrisBookPicks.aspx#18 |
| 1000 Places to see before you die | Chichen Itza , 2.5 hours drive from Cancun is the Granddaddy of Mayan ruin sites in the Yucatan Peninsula and one of the most grandiose in the Mayan world. What also makes this a wonderful site to visit is there has been much restoration done, the grounds are manicured and there are tourist services including restaurants, small museum, and stores selling items not found in Playa del Carmen or Cozumel. |
| Must Sees | Xcaret: Hanging out on the beach, scuba and snorkeling, cavern diving, visiting ruins, taking a siesta in a hammock under a grove of palm trees, hiking through tropical forest, meeting native Maya peoples - Xcaret has all that plus handicraft exhibitions, a bat cave, a butterfly pavilion, mushroom and orchid nurseries, and lots of wildlife on display (the park has several conservation programs for endangered species), native jaguars, manatees, sea turtles, monkeys, macaws, flamingos, and a petting aquarium. Children love it. What probably receives most of the comments is the underground river (a natural feature of the park and common in much of the Yucatán) that's been opened in places to allow snorkelers to paddle along with the current. There are also a number of tours and shows, including charros (Mexican cowboys) from the state of Jalisco, and the Totonac Indian voladores ("flyers" who do a daring pole dance high above the ground) from the state of Veracruz. Xcaret is 10km south of Playa del Carmen. It's open daily from 8:30am to 9pm. Admission prices are \$54 for adults, \$28 for children 5 to 12. www.xcaret.com |

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| SPORTS ACTIVITIES | |
| Golf | Currently this region features 10 quality golf courses , created by world class designers such as Robert Trent Jones, Jr., Robert von Hagge, Jack Nicklaus, Greg Norman and P.B. Dye. The Mexican Caribbean will generate more than 200,000 rounds of golf a year. This new Golf Paradise has already been host to International tournaments like The Mayakoba Golf Classic Riviera Maya - Cancun (the first PGA Tour Event to be held outside of the United States or Canada). Perhaps the best known is the Pok-Ta-Pok Club, a Robert Trent Jones designed course where a round will cost \$105 including cart. The golf courses in Cancun and the Riviera Maya feature challenging fairways that present players with distinctive curves and gentle hills, all framed by colorful tropical vegetation. Some are even built around ancient Mayan temples. From tee to green, views of the Caribbean's turquoise |

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waters and pure white beaches stretch out in the distance with an abundance of wildlife in view.

Cancun Golf Club at Pok Ta Pok - Robert Trent Jones Jr

Cancun Golf Club at Pok Ta Pok, designed by Robert Trent Jones Jr. in 1976, is considered a leader in golf in this region. Those who visit Cancun know that playing a round of golf on this course is a must.

Hilton Cancun Golf Club

The 18-Hole, Par 72 Championship golf course at Hilton Cancun Golf Club is set within 150 acres of tropical paradise. With lush fairways tended with the utmost care meandering through ancient Mayan Ruins, this challenging, yet fair golf course is enjoyable for golfers of all handicaps

Moon Spa & Golf Club – Jack Niklaus Signature Golf Course

Moon Spa & Golf Club is one of the Nicklaus Signature Golf Courses in Cancun and the Riviera Maya and was designed with a unique concept of environmental conservation. It is surrounded by a beautiful landscape, natural mangroves and exotic animals. This 27-hole course will be an unforgettable experience.

Riviera Cancun – Jack Niklaus Signature Golf Course

Two brand new golf courses can be found at the Riviera Cancun with the famous Jack Niklaus Signature design. With Par 72 and undulating fairways at the edge of the turquoise Caribbean sea it will be an exhilarating experience for any golfer.

Mayan Palace Riviera Maya – Jack Niklaus

This is another Niklaus Design golf course found at the Mayan Palace Riviera Maya between Cancun and Playa Del Carmen. It features traps of radiant, white sand, lakes surrounded by natural rocks and the intense color of the greens. The extraordinary natural landscape featuring lakes and native Mayan vegetation all make for a challenging yet beautiful golf course.

Cozumel Country Club – Jack Niklaus

The Cozumel Country Club has been carefully crafted from the surrounding mangrove marshlands and tropical rainforest to preserve its environmental integrity, as well as providing attractive challenges for players of every skill level.

El Camaleon Mayakoba – Greg Norman

El Camaleon Mayakoba designed by Greg Norman stretches from the jungle to the mangroves and on to the most beautiful ocean views.

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| | <p>El Camaleon Mayakoba is the first golf course in Mexico to be chosen by the PGA. They now hold the PGA Tour, and have committed to carry out the PGA event during the third week of February for the next several years.</p> <p>Playacar Spa & Golf Club – Robert Van Hagge Playacar Spa & Golf Club was designed and constructed under the supervision of the famous architect Robert Von Hagge. This magnificent golf course surrounded by a diversity of lakes and exuberant vegetation, is considered to be one of the most challenging golf courses in Cancun or the Riviera Maya.</p> <p>Iberostar Playa Paraiso Golf Club – P.B. Dye Iberostar Playa Paraiso Golf Club, located about 30 minutes south of Cancun, is the latest creation of world-renowned golf course architect P.B. Dye. The vertical movement and distinctive rock work are signatures of a typical P.B. Dye design. This world-class layout features conditions seen only at the best golf destinations around the world.</p> <p>Cancun Country Club Cancun Country Club consists of two 18-hole courses – one designed by Tom Fazio, considered to be one of the world’s great golf design architects and one by Nick Price.</p> |
| <p>Fishing</p> | <p>Sportfishing Riviera Maya is one of the best sportfishing hotspots in the world... Sportfishing in Cancun is on a ‘catch and release’ basis and goes in seasons. From February to April the top catches are kingfish, barracuda, small shark, grouper and blue marlin. From April to August you will find blue marlin, sailfish, tuna and mahi-mahi. Then from September to February catches include barracuda, snapper and mackerel. Book a sportfishing excursion and you are guaranteed an exhilarating day out!</p> <p>Fly fishing The lagoon system around Cancun offers the angler all year round opportunities to catch and release a great variety of species such as tarpon, bonefish, barracuda, sea trout, and red snapper. Fly fishing can be done in the sea, lakes, lagoons or rivers and is done in shallow, clear waters using artificial bait called a fly. You can book fly fishing lessons with one of the many tour operators.</p> <p>The fishing is best March to August; you can arrange a day of deep-sea fishing at one of the numerous piers or travel agencies for around \$220 to \$360 for 4 hours, \$420 for 6 hours, and \$520 for 8 hours for up to four people. Marinas will sometimes assist in putting together a group. Charters include a captain, a first mate, bait, gear, and beverages.</p> |

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| Horse riding | Rancho Loma Bonita: 30 minutes south of Cancun has a 5 hour package riding through mangrove swamps to the beach for a swim \$54 |
| Hiking | The long stretch of beach by the resorts is ideal for strolls by the ocean |
| Cycling | Bikes are available for rent in Puerto del Carmen and Cancun |
| Diving | <p>Riviera Maya offers an unimaginable world of underwater beauty and is one of the best places in the world for scuba diving; it's famous because of its shallow reefs alive with the dazzling colours of fish and coral. Scuba diving in Cancun is so popular largely because of the Great Mesoamerican Reef (the Gran Arrecife Maya). This is the largest reef in the Western Hemisphere and the second largest coral reef in the world. The Great Mesoamerican Reef stretches from Punta Nizuc, which it at the tip of the Cancun Hotel Zone, all the way to the Bay of Islands in Honduras. Cancun's coastline is home to nearly 100 coral species, 350 molluscs and 164 species of reef dwelling fish.</p> <p>The Riviera Maya is also the home to the hawksbill sea turtle, crocodiles, lemon sharks and manatees.</p> <p>There are many fascinating scuba diving venues for both the novice as well as the more experienced diver. You have a choice of open water diving along the reef and there are also several sunken boats to add to the adventure. If you go inland along the Cancun – Tulum corridor you will find many caverns and cenotes, also known as "sink holes".</p> <p>Cyan-Ha Diving Centre arranges reef and cavern diving. Many of the hotels have free introductory dives and dive shops.</p> |

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| CULTURE | <p>Mayan Culture The Mayan civilization was among the original cultures of the New World and spanned more than 3,000 years. The Mayans lived mainly on the Yucatan Peninsula in the eastern one third of Mesoamerica and at its peak had one of the most densely populated and culturally dynamic societies in the world. Mayan culture is known for its spectacular art, impressive architecture, and sophisticated mathematical and astronomical systems which were all way ahead of their time.</p> <p>Mayan Architecture Mayan architecture spans many thousands of years. The most dramatic and easily recognizable are the fantastic stepped pyramids in places such as Chichen Itza and Coba to name but a few. A year ago Chichen Itza was named as one of the seven wonders of the world, and has been a UNESCO World Heritage Site for 20 years.</p> <p>The Mayan Calendar The Mayan Calendar was not the original Mesoamerican calendar, but with the refinements the Mayans made, it became the most sophisticated.</p> |
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| | <p>The Mayan calendar along with the Aztec calendar are the best documented and most completely understood of all the Mesoamerican calendars. This year, 2012, the Maya Long Cycle of over 5,000 years ends and there has been much written about what this portends...</p> <p>Mayan Scripture and Mayan Art Mayan scripture is the only known fully developed written language of the pre-Columbian Americas. Mayan art is considered by many to be the most sophisticated and beautiful of the ancient New World.</p> <p>Mayan Tree of Life The Mayan civilization recognised the four primary compass directions and each was associated with a colour – East with red, North with white, West with black and South with yellow. They also had a fifth ‘direction’ which was the center and this was a blue-green colour. The center was represented by a great ceiba tree known as the Mayan tree of life. This tree connected the center of the Earth with both the underworld and the heavens.</p> <p>Mayan Gods There were thirteen Mayan gods belonging to the thirteen of heavens of the Mayan religion and nine gods from the nine underworlds. Natural elements such as the stars and the planets, crops, numbers, days and periods of time each had their own gods. The mood of the Mayan gods changed according to the days in the Mayan calendar or the position of the sun, moon and stars. Some of most notable gods are Chaac – God of Rain and Thunder, Ixchel – jaguar goddess of midwifery, Ah Puch – God of Death.</p> <p>Today, the Mayan civilization and their descendants form sizable populations throughout the Maya area known as the Mundo Maya and maintain a distinctive set of traditions and beliefs. Over 500 different Mayan languages continue to be spoken today.</p> <p>To visit some of these sites and experience the beauty of the Mayan civilization really is an opportunity not to be missed during your Cancun vacation. There are many tours available from your hotel or tour operator.</p> |
| <p>Museums</p> | <p>Museo de Arte Popular Mexicano, located at on the second floor of the El Embarcadero Marina, Bulevar Kukulcán Km 4. It displays a representative collection of masks, regional folkloric costumes, nativity scenes, religious artifacts, musical instruments, Mexican toys, and gourd art.</p> <p>Shipwreck Museum, Puerto Aventuras - a fascinating display of</p> |

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| | wreckage and artifacts collected from shipwrecks along the eastern coastline. Exhibits include 16th century breech-loading cannons and an elephant tusk from the wreckage of a 17th century ship carrying African slaves and ivory. |
| Festivals | <p>Santa Semana: Holy Week is a huge celebration in Mexico with colourful street processions...but be sure to book early as everywhere is sure to be very busy.</p> <p>Spring Equinox is celebrated with parades to welcome the spring and at Chichen Itza's main pyramid, the shadows align and the plumed serpent moves slowly from the top of the building to its base...</p> <p>Winter Equinox will be another major event and most Maya sites, as this is the day when their 5,000 year Long Cycle ends.</p> <p>Riviera Maya Jazz Festival November The annual Riviera Maya Jazz Festival attracts an enthusiastic crowd to Mamitas Beach in Playa del Carmen to enjoy free performances by national and international acts. http://www.rivieramayajazzfestival.com</p> |

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| ATTRACTIONS | <p>Beautiful lagoons and bays full of colorful fish & sea turtles Fascinating Mayan ruins at Tulum, Coba and Xel-Ha Second-largest barrier coral reef in the world Miles of white sand beaches Unique "eco-archeological" theme parks, Xcaret & Xel-Ha Lots of Cenotes [natural pools of clear water- amazing to swim in] Aktun Ha [giant caves on road to Coba] Playa del Carmen [the fastest growing city in Latin America] Cozumel Island [diving and snorkeling] Magnificent resorts and hotels Unbelievable shopping Fabulous food</p> |
| Beaches | <p>Almost the whole length of the Mayan Riviera is bordered by beautiful white sand beaches. These beaches have recently been considerably enhanced with additional sand to make them broader and better than ever after recent coastal erosion.</p> |
| Wildlife | <p>Swimming with Whale Sharks Whale sharks are the gentle giants of the ocean. They are the largest fish in the world measuring up to 40 feet (12 meters) and weighing up to 15 tons. Fortunately for those of us that want to swim with the whale shark they are totally harmless and peaceful. During your vacation in Cancun you have the once in a lifetime opportunity to get up close to one of these amazing creatures.</p> <p>Whale Shark Facts The whale shark is a fascinating creature to behold, with its wide mouth</p> |

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| | <p>extending to 5 feet when open. The whale shark swims with its mouth open, close to the surface of the water, and just sucks in the plankton. It then closes its mouth and forces all the unwanted water out of its gills and only the plankton remains. The whale shark has a unique checkerboard pattern on its back made up of creamy white spots and pale horizontal and vertical stripes with a white underbelly so is easily distinguishable. This pattern is why it is also often known as the Domino.</p> <p>Whale Shark Season If adventurers want to take advantage of this phenomenon, you must bear in mind that the whale sharks are usually found around the islands of Holbox and Contoy from May until September, although mostly during the months of July and August. They gather here due to the nutrient -rich water around these shores. In fact, 30th August has now been formally established as the Mexican Day of the Whale Shark.</p> <p>Tours to Swim with Whale Sharks You can book tours to swim with the whale sharks leaving Cancun from Punta Sam, which last about 5 hours, or you can take a trip to Isla Holbox and book it while you are there. If you choose to experience swimming with the whale shark you will be accompanied by experts who will provide you with all the necessary information to better understand the behaviour of these wonderful creatures. Take a look at some of our recommended tour operators. If you would like to swim with a whale shark just remember there is nothing to fear... they feed exclusively on plankton and are therefore completely harmless to humans. The experience is truly amazing and one you will never forget.</p> |
| <p>Parks</p> | <p>There is a plethora of beautiful nature reserves and protected areas you can visit near Cancun. You will get the opportunity to observe monkeys, flamingos, whale sharks, marine turtles, crocodiles and many more creatures in their natural habitat. The flora and fauna is also incredible! You can arrange guided tours lasting from one day to several days where you can pursue activities such as kayaking, hiking, snorkeling and diving.</p> <p>Cozumel Reef National Park In 1996, an 11,988-hectare (29 acres) area of sea and coral reefs, was declared the Cozumel Reef National Park. Cozumel is the Caribbean's premier dive spot with 85% of the region's dive sites. Isla Mujeres West Coast, Punta Cancun and Punta Nizuc National Park. It covers 8,673 hectares (21 acres) of reefs that are part of the Mesoamerican Reef System. The estimated age of the base coral is 125,000 years and the reef consists of a chain of coral formations of varying sizes. The park protects a triangle of reefs off the west coast of Isla Mujeres, Punta</p> |

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| | <p>Cancún and Punta Nizuc.</p> <p>Isla Contoy National Park The island, covering 5,126 sq. hectares (12.667 sq. acres), was declared a National Park on February 2, 1998. The coral reefs within the park's perimeter -called an "islet"- are located south of the island and mark the beginning of a 389-kilometer barrier reef running along the coast of Quintana Roo. This is the birthplace of the Mesoamerican Reef System. For more information visit: www.contoy.org www.islacontoy.org www.kolumbustours.com www.birdingcontoy.com</p> <p>Puerto Morelos Reef National Park The 9,066 square-hectare (22.402 sq. acres) park was set up in 1998. The barrier reef borders the Isla Mujeres West Coast, Punta Cancún and Punta Nizuc National Park.</p> <p>Chinchorro Bank Biosphere Reserve The Chinchorro Bank Biosphere Reserve was created in 1996. The country's best-preserved reef system covers 144,360 square hectares. A platform reef, it has the largest commercial population of pink conch and Caribbean lobster and is important for the fishing industry. It is also a sea turtle nesting ground and at least 93 bird species live in the area's mangroves. The reef is a fantastic spot for divers. It is also a magnet for scientists who study its biodiversity and underwater archaeological heritage (there are more than 20 shipwrecks here).</p> <p>Sian Ka'an Biosphere Reserve Declared a United Nations World Heritage Site, the Biosphere Reserve was created on January 20, 1986 and the Uaymil Flora and Fauna Protected Area and the Sian Ka'an Biosphere Reefs Reserve were created in 1994 and 1998, respectively. The three reserves cover an area of 650,000 square hectares. They incorporate areas of the principal ecosystems found in the Yucatán Peninsula and the Caribbean, where both Mesoamerican and Antillean species flourish. The barrier reef extends for some 120 kilometers (74.5 miles) and covers approximately 15,000 hectares (37.065 acres).</p> |
| <p>Castles/Forts</p> | <p>Tulum Ruins is a small site. It has an excellent beach for swimming and cooling off, shopping and food. This makes an excellent half-day excursion and is easy to get to anywhere on the Mayan Riviera from Tulum to Playa del Carmen. You can use a tour company or go there yourself via colectivo.</p> |

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| | <p>Coba is deep in the jungle a 45 minutes drive off of Hwy 307 just before Tulum. There is a lot more to see here than Tulum including large temples/pyramids. Taking a colectivo here can be done but it's not recommended; better to rent a car and drive yourself in or take a tour.</p> |
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| OTHER ACTIVITIES | |
| Shopping | <p>As one of the world's premier tourist destinations the shopping in Cancun is as impressive as one would imagine. You will find everything from ultra-chic designer stores and famous brand names, to flea markets and souvenir shops selling Mexican local handcrafts. Cancun shopping is duty free so you can find some real bargains on cosmetics and fine jewellery. There are many shopping malls in Cancun: here is a list of just some of the great places to go if you fancy shopping in Cancun whether it be for a new designer outfit for yourself or a gift to take home to your loved ones</p> <p>La Isla Shopping Village, Cancun La Isla Shopping Village is a glittering, ultra-trendy shoppers' paradise on the banks of the Nichupte Lagoon in the Hotel Zone Cancun. You will find over 150 shops here all under a giant canopy with a series of canals and small bridges designed to create a Venetian look. There is an amazing aquarium here as well as fabulous restaurants and cinemas showing movies in English and Spanish.</p> <p>Kukulcan Plaza & Luxury Avenue Kukulcan Plaza & Luxury Avenue are adjacent to each other in the Hotel Zone. Between them they boast more than 250 shops and boutiques in exclusive and luxurious surroundings including world famous brands such as Louis Vuitton and Cartier. There are many specialty restaurants, bars and cafes and even a bowling alley if you are looking for something fun to do.</p> <p>Plaza Caracol Plaza Caracol is situated just north of the Cancun Convention Center. There are over 200 shops and boutiques where you will find everything from Ralph Lauren and Sunglass Island to chic perfumeries such as Ultrafemme to souvenir and silver jewellery stores. There is also a great choice of restaurants and cafes if you need to take a rest from shopping in Cancun.</p> <p>Plaza Las Americas Plaza Las Americas is found in downtown Cancun. There are three large department stores as well as more than 50 stores – fashion shops – bookstores – sportswear – just about everything you might need. There</p> |

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| | <p>are also two fantastic cinemas here showing movies in English and Spanish as well as a choice of restaurants.</p> <p>Also, Fifth Avenue in Playa del Carmen is a good shopping street.</p> |
| Markets | <p>Market 28: Also known as the Mercado 28 this is a huge flea market situated in the heart of downtown Cancun. It is a fun place to buy your souvenirs, Mexican handcrafts and silver jewelry at half the price of the Hotel Zone. Next door you will find Plaza Bonita, built to resemble a small Mexican village with colourful architecture and shops selling good quality Mexican handcrafts and pieces of art.</p> |
| Nightlife | <p>For a night out, Playa del Carmen is the place to go. Almost all activity take place around Playa's 5th Avenue which is a pedestrian walk way filled with restaurants, sidewalk cafes, bars, handicraft stores where people from all over world get together giving this town its cosmopolitan atmosphere - The Blue Parrot is particularly well known.</p> |

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| CUISINE | |
| Food | <p>The annual Mexico-Caribbean Food Festival, featuring special menus of culinary creations throughout Cancun, is held each year over the first two weeks of November.</p> |
| Drink | <p>Tequila! Tequila is a blue agave-based spirit made primarily in the area surrounding the city of Tequila, 65 kilometres northwest of Guadalajara, and in the highlands (Los Altos) of the western Mexican state of Jalisco. Try the different varieties available.</p> <p>Beer: Many think that as long as it is cold and being imbibed anywhere in Mexico... whatever it is, it IS the best beer. Bohemia, Negro Modelo, Modelo Especial, Dos Equis, Dos Equis Amber, Pacifico, Montejo, Victoria, Tecate Light, Sol, Leon and the ubiquitous Corona are all well liked and satisfying. Carta Blanca is also an old, satisfying beer. Barriardo Lessardo is pretty good as well.....</p> <p>When touring off of the resort find a small convenience shop. They will give you a few options other than the norm. Try the Corona Familiar (a huge quart) which cannot be bought in Canada. It tastes a bit stronger but is more pleasant tasting than the regular corona. Also, try the Corona Cerveza de Barril. (They look like little "Mickey" Bottles.) It is also much better than Corona regular. If you have the opportunity to be in Mexico over the Christmas season, try the Noche Buena by Dos Equis. It is a darker full flavored brew that is not exported either and can only be found in Mexico.</p> |
| Restaurants | <p>The resort located restaurants are often first class in this area. U.S.-based franchise chains, which really need no introduction, dominate the Cancún restaurant scene. These include Hard Rock Cafe, Rainforest Cafe, Tony Roma's, TGI Friday's, Ruth's Chris Steak House,</p> |

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| | <p>and the gamut of fast-food burger places.</p> <p>La Cueva del Chango in Puerto del Carmen is recommended: Good food in original surroundings with a relaxed "mañana" attitude. True to its name ("The Monkey's Cave"), the place suggests a cave and has little waterways meandering through it, and there are two spider monkeys that hang about in the back of the place. You'll enjoy great juices, blended fruit drinks, salads, soups, Mexican specialties with a natural twist, and handmade tortillas. The fish is fresh and delicious.</p> <p>Yaxche: The menu in this Puerto del Carmen eatery makes use of many native foods and spices to present a more elaborate regional cooking than the usual offerings at Yucatecan restaurants. Excellent examples are a cream of chaya (a native leafy vegetable), an exotic chili stuffed with cochinita pibil and the classic Mexican-style fruit salad with lime juice and dried powdered chili. There are several seafood dishes that are fresh and well prepared.</p> |
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| MORE INFO | |
| Brochures | Transat Holidays and Nolitours Sun 2012 brochures are available at all agents. |
| Websites | Cancún Convention & Visitors Bureau: www.cancun.info - The official site of the Cancún Convention & Visitors Bureau lists excellent information on events and attractions. It has an active message board of recent visitors to Cancún. www.TransatHolidays.com and www.Nolitours.com |

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| AIRLINE PARTNER | Air Transat |
| Flight details | Flights direct from Montreal, Toronto, Ottawa and many other Canadian airports directly to Cancun. www.airtransat.com |

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| PERSONAL | I have visited the Mayan Riviera, Puerto del Carmen and Cancun many times. I have also explored the atmospheric archaeological sites of Tulum and Coba. |
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| <p>PUNTA CANA, DOMINICAN REPUBLIC</p> | <p>Come away to paradise in the Dominican Republic. Explore the white sandy beaches, impressive mountain ranges, spectacular waterfalls and lush greenery of the Dominican Republic. And the history, music, food and culture that give it such charm and spirit.</p> <p>In Punta Cana there are miles of silky-fine white sand, gorgeous beaches, coconut palms, crystal clear turquoise waters and lush vegetation - Punta Cana certainly has the wow factor. Beyond its exceptional natural beauty, this vacation spot offers something for everyone. Sail to the idyllic island of Saona, play a round or two of golf at one of the many courses, swim with dolphins, discover the countryside as you drive your own Jeep or go zip lining above the trees.</p> |
| <p>Location</p> | <p>In the heart of the Caribbean archipelago - nestled amid Cuba, Jamaica, and Puerto Rico - the island of Hispaniola (Little Spain) is divided between Haiti, on the westernmost third of the island, and the Dominican Republic, which has a lush landmass about the size of Vermont and New Hampshire combined. In the Dominican interior, the fertile Valley of Cibao (rich sugar-cane country) ends its upward sweep at Pico Duarte, the highest mountain peak in the West Indies, which soars to 3,125m (10,250 ft.).</p> <p>Much of what Columbus first sighted still remains in a natural, unspoiled condition. One-third of the Dominican Republic's 1,401km coastline is devoted to beaches of which the most celebrated are those around Punta Cana, which lies in the east of the country.</p> |
| <p>Geography</p> | <p>The mountains of the Dominican Republic divide the country into northern, central, and southwestern regions. The northern region includes the Cordillera Septentrional (northern mountain range), the Cibao Valley, which is the country's major agricultural area; and the tropical Samaná Peninsula with its coconut plantations and bay, where humpback whales breed.</p> <p>The central region is dominated by the Cordillera Central (central range) which ends at the Caribbean Sea. The highest point in the Caribbean is Pico Duarte, which reaches an elevation of over 10,414 feet (3,175 meters) and has alpine forests near the summit. The Caribbean coastal plain includes a series of limestone terraces that gradually rise to a height of about 328 feet (100 meters) and has sugarcane plantations.</p> <p>The southwestern region lies south of the Valle de San Juan and encompasses the Sierra de Neiba. Much of the region is a desert and it includes Lake Enriquillo, the island's largest lake. Lake Enriquillo is a saltwater lake that lies 150 feet (46 meters) below sea level and is inhabited by unique fauna, including crocodiles, huge iguanas, and flamingos.</p> <p>Pico Duarte was not climbed until 1944; it's now a 3 day hike, \$240 plus 4</p> |

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| | mules. |
| Name | Hispaniola was named “Little Spain” by Colombus |
| Population | Approximately 9.2 million |
| Language | The official language is Spanish; many people also speak some English. |
| Currency | The Dominican monetary unit is the peso (RD\$), made up of 100 centavos. Coin denominations are 1, 5, 10, 25, and 50 centavos, 1 peso, and 5 pesos. Bill denominations are RD\$5, RD\$10, RD\$20, RD\$50, RD\$100, RD\$500, RD\$1,000, and RD\$2,000. Price quotations in this section sometimes appear in U.S. and sometimes in Dominican currency, depending on the policy of the establishment. Currently, 38 pesos = Cdn \$ at 7 th January 2012 |
| Tippling | Most restaurants and hotels add a 10% service charge to your check. Most people usually add 5% to 10% more, especially if the service has been good. |
| Government | Representative democracy with Presidents elected for a 4 year term Although the DR has long been viewed primarily as an exporter of sugar, coffee, and tobacco, in recent years the service sector has overtaken agriculture as the economy's largest employer due to growth in tourism |
| Documentation | Canadians traveling to the Dominican Republic require a valid Canadian passport as of April 30, 2012. You will also require tourist card which will be provided on the aircraft during your southbound flight. Minors (under the age of 18) being nationals of Canada in addition to the above documentation requirements must: if traveling as an unaccompanied minor or with an adult other than a parent or legal guardian must hold a permit issued by the Consulate of Dominican Republic in Canada or the Director General's Office of Immigration in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic to leave the country of Dominican Republic. Baptismal Certificates are not acceptable as a birth certificate, nor are birth certificates issued in Quebec prior to January 1, 1994. Please contact the Consulate of Dominican Republic for more information. |
| Time zone | One hour ahead of EST |
| Health | Stick to bottled water outside of the main resorts. Consult your doctor about Malaria and Dengue Fever – very unlikely threat to tourists but you may want to additionally protect yourself anyway. |
| Safety tips | Safety is still a concern in the Dominican Republic, but it shouldn't dissuade you from planning a vacation here. Crime consists primarily of theft, robberies, and muggings, and most of it is limited to Santo Domingo. There is a low incidence of violent crime against tourists, however. Follow simple common-sense rules, and you'll be fine. |

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| CLIMATE | |
| General climate | The average temperature is 25°C. August is the warmest month, and January the coolest month, although even then it's warm enough to |

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| | swim. |
| Today's weather | 27 degrees Centigrade and mostly sunny for 7 th January 2012.. |
| Best time to visit | The DR is a year-round destination, but with special attraction to Canadians during the cold winter months! Hurricane season is generally September and October, but you would be very unlucky indeed to experience one of these storms. |

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| GETTING THERE | There are daily flights to Punta Cana from Canada. |
| Flying time | It's just over a 4 hour flight from Toronto or Montreal with Air Transat. There is a departure tax of US\$20 which must be paid in U.S. currency as at January 2012. |
| Punta Cana | <p>On the easternmost tip of the island is Punta Cana, site of several major vacation developments with more scheduled to arrive in the near future. Known for its spectacular beaches and clear waters, Punta Cana is an escapist's dream. Its 32km of white sands, set against a backdrop of swaying palm trees, are unrivaled in the Caribbean, and that's the chief and perhaps only reason to come here.</p> <p>Many Europeans (especially Spaniards) rushed to take advantage of Punta Cana's desirable climate - within one of the most arid landscapes in the Caribbean; it rarely rains during daylight hours. Capitalizing on cheap land and the virtually insatiable desire of Europeans for sunny holidays during the depths of winter, a half-dozen European hotel chains participated in something akin to a land rush, acquiring large tracts of sugar-cane plantations and pastureland. Today, at least a dozen mega-hotels, most with no fewer than 500 rooms, some with even more, attract a clientele that's about 70% European or Latin American. Some of them have some of the most lavish beach and pool facilities in the Caribbean, spectacular gardens, and relatively new concepts in architecture (focusing on postmodern interplays between indoor and outdoor spaces).</p> <p>If you choose to vacation in Punta Cana, you won't be alone, as increasing numbers of Latino celebrities are making inroads, usually renting private villas within private compounds. Julio Iglesias and celebrity designer Oscar de la Renta both spend time here.</p> |
| Santo Domingo | <p>Santo Domingo is one of the Caribbean's most vibrant cities, with a 12-block Colonial Zone to rival that of Old San Juan in Puerto Rico. Come here to walk in the footsteps of Cortés, Ponce de León, and, of course, Columbus himself. Allow at least a day to capture some of the highlights of the old city such as its Alcazar and its Cathedral Santa Maria la Menor.</p> <p>Bartholomeo Columbus, brother of Christopher, founded the city of New Isabella (later renamed Santo Domingo) on the southeastern Caribbean coast in 1496. It's the oldest city in the New World and the capital of the Dominican Republic. Santo Domingo has had a long, sometimes</p> |

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| | glorious, more often sad, history. At the peak of its power, Diego de Velázquez sailed from here to settle Cuba, Ponce de León went forth to conquer and settle Puerto Rico and Florida, and Cortés set out for Mexico. The city today still reflects its long history - French, Haitian, and especially Spanish. |
| Distances | Santo Domingo to Puerto Plata: 235km; to La Romana: 130km; to Punta Cana: 225km; to La Samana: 320km |
| Ferries | Shuttle boats to Cayo Levantado from Samana Also ferry to Sabana de la Mar across Samana Bay |
| Trains | There is no passenger train service in the DR |
| Car Rental | The best way to see the Dominican Republic is to drive. Motorists drive on the right here. Although major highways are relatively smooth, the country's secondary roads, especially those in the east, are riddled with potholes and ruts. Roads also tend to be badly lit and poorly marked in both the city and the countryside. Drive carefully and give yourself plenty of time when traveling between island destinations. For reservations and more information, call the rental companies at least a week before your departure: Avis (tel. 800/331-1212 in the U.S. and Canada, or 809/535-7191; www.avis.com), Budget (tel. 800/527-0700 in the U.S. and Canada, or 809/549-0351; www.budget.com), and Hertz (tel. 800/654-3131 in the U.S. and Canada, or 809/221-5333; www.hertz.com) all operate in the Dominican Republic. All three have offices at the Santo Domingo and Puerto Plata airports, as well as in downtown Santo Domingo. Avis and Hertz also have offices in La Romana and in Punta Cana. |
| Buses | Públicos are unmetered multipassenger taxis that travel along main thoroughfares, stopping often to pick up people waving from the side of the street. A público is marked by a white seal on the front door. You must tell the driver your destination when you're picked up to make sure the público is going there. A ride is usually RD\$5 (15¢/8p). The minimum fare is RD\$3 (10¢/5p). Public buses, often in the form of minivans or panel trucks, are called guaguas (pronounced gwa-gwas). For about the same price, they provide the same service as públicos, but they're generally more crowded. Larger buses provide service outside the towns. |

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| ACCOMMODATION TYPES | Transat Holidays and Nolitours feature the widest range of hotels and resorts in the DR, from value 3 star to all-singing, all-dancing 5 star resorts |
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| LIFESTYLES | |
| Kids | Acuario Nacional, Santo Domingo Phone: (809) 766-1709 Open from Tuesday to Sunday from 9:30am to 5:30 pm. |

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| | <p>Bordering the Caribbean Sea, the national aquarium offers visitors a glimpse of the Caribbean's diverse, colorful sea life. The aquarium's Plexiglas tunnel surrounds spectators with water, sharks, rays and conger eels. A variety of colorful fish swim throughout the tunnel, while exhibits explain different types of marine environments.</p> <p>Manati Park, Bavaro, Punta Cana Phone: (809) 221-9444 Website: www.manatipark.com Manati Theme Park focuses on nature, animals and the history of the Dominican Republic. Located in Bavaro-Punta Cana, the park is centered on an incredible landscape of magnificent gardens abundant with orchids and tropical plants. This park is a huge hit with kids as it encourages them, with the assistance of professionals, to hold non-poisonous snakes and play in a pool with dolphins.</p> <p>Parque Zoologico Nacional, Santo Domingo Phone: (809) 562-3149. http://www.zoodom.gov.do Open Tuesday to Sunday, 9am to 5pm Located north of Santo Domingo, Parque Zoologico is one of the largest zoos in Latin America. The 320-acre park provides guests with the opportunity to see intriguing animals like tigers, chimps and hyenas, while also offering glimpses of crocodiles, flamingos and nocturnal anteaters. Whether children are discovering creatures in the large landscaped grounds or going for a ride on the shuttle train, they're sure to enjoy their visit to Santo Domingo's National Zoo.</p> |
| <p>Teens</p> | <p>Islabon Jungle River Tour Phone: (809) 248-2818 Located about three miles east of Cabarete, the Islabon Jungle River Tour allows kids to explore the Islabon river area by boat and walk through jungle trails to a mini zoo that includes iguanas, snakes, turtles, ravens and North American crocodiles. The tour includes an informative chat about the nature found in the area.</p> <p>Monster Truck Safari Phone: (809) 244-4060 This full-day adventure tour allows participants to experience the diversity and beauty of the Dominican countryside in a fun, comfortable and safe environment. Holding approximately (28 people for small jeeps, and 32 for large), the large eight-wheel drive safari jeeps are driven by professionals on a variety of terrain. Participants are seated up high to ensure an exceptional view of the countryside and will be covered in case of rain. Various stops throughout the day offer a glimpse of true Dominican culture and life.</p> |

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| Romance | Lush tropical forests, rolling mountains and long deserted beaches – perfect! |
| Honeymoons & Weddings | Transat can help you arrange weddings, honeymoons and vow renewals in the Dominican Republic. Let them know through your travel agent and take a look at page 22/23 of their Transat Holidays 2012 brochure for more details. |
| Seniors | Endless beaches, excellent resorts and accessible tours to the countryside make this an excellent choice for the older vacationer. |

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| UNIQUES | <p>Usually starting in January and lasting until late March, Samana's humpback whales return every year to these tropical waters. Tours originate from Samana and Las Galeras (and several bayside locations in between) and from Las Terrenas.</p> <p>Whale-watching as a local tourist industry was begun in the 1980s by Kim Beddall, then an itinerant scuba instructor with no formal training as a marine biologist – although she's since been instrumental in the implementation of a code of conduct for whale-watch boats. Beddall still runs excellent whale boat tours through her Whale Samaná/Victoria Marine operation, Malecón (US\$45) that allow you to get an up-close look at the humpbacks; sitings are guaranteed in season</p> |
| Surprising | Los Altos de Chavon village near the south coast is an oddball 16th century Italian style confection on hilltop, crafts, workshops, Taino Art Museum, great views, shopping, restaurants. |
| History | <p>For at least 5,000 years before Christopher Columbus discovered America for the Europeans the island was inhabited by Amer-Indians. Anthropologists have traced multiple waves of indigenous immigration from two principle places. Some of the early Amer-Indians came from Central America (probably Yucatan and/or Belize) and some came from South America, descendants of the Arawakan Indians in Amazonia, many of whom passed through the Orinocco Valley in Venezuela. It is from the blending of these waves of indigenous immigrants that the Taíno Indians, the people who welcomed Columbus on his arrival, are believed to have originated.</p> <p>The Dominican Republic was discovered on December 5, 1492, by Christopher Columbus during his first voyage to the New World. At that time the island of Hispaniola (as Columbus named it) was called "Quisqueya" by the Taino Indians who occupied the land. With a population estimated around 600,000, the Tainos (meaning "the good") were peaceful and hospitable to Columbus and his crew of Spaniards. Columbus himself grew a particular fondness for Hispaniola, describing it in his journal as "a beautiful island paradise with high forested mountains and large river valleys."</p> |

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Columbus' admiration for Hispaniola coupled with his crew's discovery of gold deposits in the island's rivers led to the establishment of European settlements, the first of which was founded in 1493 in La Isabela. With the presence of new settlements, the Taino Indians were put into slavery and over the next 25 year, were eventually wiped out. Simultaneously, the settlers began bringing African slaves to the island to ensure adequate labor for their plantations.

Columbus' brother, Bartholomew, was appointed governor of Hispaniola and in 1496 he founded the city of Santo Domingo. The capital city quickly became the representative seat of the Spanish royal court and therefore, a city of power and much influence. However, by 1515 the Spaniards realized the gold deposits of Hispaniola had significantly dwindled. Around this time Herman Cortes discovered silver deposits in Mexico. Upon hearing this news, most Spanish residents of Santo Domingo left for Mexico, leaving only a few thousand settlers behind. Because of the predominance of livestock, initially introduced by Columbus, these settlers sustained themselves by providing food and leather to Spanish ships passing Hispaniola on their way to the richer colonies on the American mainland. It is during this period of time that the pirates of the Caribbean made history.

The island of Hispaniola remained under Spanish control until 1697 when the western third of the island became a French possession. (In 1804, the western part of the island became the Republic of Haiti.) This area, which the French called "Saint Domingue" became the richest colony in the world thanks to large sugar plantations which were worked by hundreds of thousands of slaves imported from Africa. In 1791 a slave revolt broke out in Saint Domingue. For fear of losing their colony to the slaves, the French abolished slavery in 1794. With calm in Saint Domingue, the French were able to focus on overwhelming the Spanish on the island's eastern side, who later surrendered power.

In 1809 the eastern side of the island returned to Spanish rule. In 1821 the Spanish settlers declared an independent state but just weeks later, Haitian forces invaded the eastern portion of the island and incorporated Santo Domingo. For the next 22 years the entire island came under Haitian control. However, fueled by their loss of political and economic control, the former Spanish ruling class developed an underground resistance group led by Juan Pablo Duarte called "La Trinitaria." After several attacks by La Trinitaria on the Haitian army, the Haitians retreated. On February 27, 1844, the eastern side of the island declared independence and gave their land the name "Dominican Republic."

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| | <p>The 70 years that followed were characterized by political unrest and civil war, mainly due to fights for leadership of the government by Dominican strongmen. Disputes continued with Haiti and power returned to the Spanish for a short period of time (Restoration Day celebrates the day that a national war of "restoration" began, re-establishing the Dominican Republic's independence by 1865). Turmoil in the early 1900's led the United States to intervene. In 1916 U.S. troops occupied the country and stayed until 1924 when a democratically elected Dominican government was put into place. However, the head of the army that was put into place during the American occupation, Raphael Leonidas Trujillo, used his power to block government reform and shortly thereafter, took total control of power in the form of a repressive dictatorship. His rule lasted until 1961 when his motorcade was ambushed and he was killed. (The anniversary of his death is a public holiday in the Dominican Republic.)</p> <p>Following Trujillo's death, political unrest again prevailed. The Dominican Republic went through a series of leaders until 1965 when Lyndon B. Johnson ordered the U.S. marines to again occupy the country. A rigged election in 1966 put Dr. Joaquin Balaguer, a member of the Partido Reformista Social Cristiano (PRSC), in power for a reign that lasted until 1978 when Dominicans elected Antonio Guzman, also of the PRD. Guzman died in 1982 at which time Dominicans elected another member of the D.R.P. In 1986 Balaguer was again elected, this time legitimately, and remained president until 1996 when President Leonel Fernandez (of the Party of the Dominican Liberation or PLD.) was elected. He served for four years and was replaced by Hipolito Mejia in 2000. Today's Leonel Fernandez is again president.</p> |
| <p>Books</p> | <p>Frommer's Caribbean 2012 An Adventure Guide to the Dominican Republic by Harry Pariser See also an article I have written for one of the airline in-flight magazines: http://www.chrisrobinsontravelshow.ca/travelarticles/TA_Dominican.pdf</p> |
| <p>1000 Places to see before you die</p> | <p>Casa de Campo near La Romana – one of the world's best golf and sporting destinations</p> |
| <p>Must Sees</p> | <p>The Cascada el Limón waterfall is immersed in a tropical forest on the Samaná peninsula. Tours offer you a relaxing, pleasant and unforgettable trip; a one- to two-hour donkey ride through tropical forest leads to this striking 55-metre waterfall. After bathing in the refreshing, crystal-clear water, you can enjoy a typical meal in the local restaurant.</p> |
| <p>SPORTS ACTIVITIES - Baseball</p> | <p>Back in 1866, American sailors stationed on the island of Cuba taught natives the rules of the game of baseball. Following the Ten Years' War (also known as the Big War) in Cuba, baseball migrated to the</p> |

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| | <p>Dominican Republic along with Cubans who were fleeing their country. Quickly nicknamed "beisbol" by the Dominican people, the sport was rapidly learned and became a passion. Today, traveling from one side of the country to the other presents national scores of baseball fields and stadiums, attesting to the Dominicans' love for the game.</p> <p>The sport first turned competitive in the 1920s when baseball games began being played against neighboring countries. This competitiveness encouraged the establishment of the Dominican Baseball League. Four baseball teams were formed: Tigres del Licey and Leones del Escogido, both from Santo Domingo, Estrellas Orientales of San Pedro and the Las Aguilos Cibaeñas in Santiago. The popularity of professional baseball in the Dominican Republic ascended throughout the following years, but came to a halt in 1937 due to a financial downturn in the country. Meanwhile, amateur baseball evolved with Dominican teams competing with those from the U.S. and other Caribbean countries. The hiatus finally ended in 1951 with the return of professional baseball. Dominicans' idea of hosting amateur baseball in the summer and professional baseball during the winter months was generated, therefore giving the Caribbean the "home of winter baseball" title.</p> <p>Today there are two additional teams in the country's professional baseball league: the Azucareros del Este from La Romana and the Gigantes del Cibao. Each season extends from the end of October through February, with the winner advancing to the Caribbean Series. At the series, the winning team of the Dominican Republic league plays against the champions of the Mexican, Venezuelan and Puerto Rican leagues.</p> <p>The baseball season is October to February each year.</p> |
| <p>Golf</p> | <p>Punta Cana: The Bávaro Golf Course, at Barcelo Bávaro Beach, Golf & Casino Resort, Bávaro Beach (tel. 809/686-5797), is the best golf course on this end of the island, and bears the honor of being the golf course whose allure helped open the eastern DR to the tourist boom. Greens fees are RD\$1,920 for 18 holes, with cart rentals going for RD\$1,440. Guests of the hotel pay only 50% of greens fees. Open daily 7am to 5pm.</p> <p>Punta Cana Golf Club, near the Punta Cana Resort and Club (tel. 809/959-4653), is the best and most sought-after of the four golf courses now flourishing in Punta Cana. Fronting the sea, it was designed by P. B. Dye of the famous golfing family. Fourteen of its holes open onto panoramic views of the Caribbean Sea, and four play along the ocean itself. For 18 holes, hotel guests pay RD\$3,520, and non-guests are charged RD\$4,800. In summer, greens fees are reduced to RD\$2,144</p> |

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| | for hotel guests, RD\$2,944 for non-guests. |
| Fishing | Sea fishing is great in all the resorts for Marlin, sailfish, bonito, tarpon, dorado and snook. You can arrange freshwater river-fishing trips through Casa de Campo in the south. Some of the biggest snook ever recorded have been caught around here. A 3-hour tour costs RD\$868 (\$31) per person, and includes tackle, bait, and soft drinks. |
| Horse riding | Within Punta Cana , the guest services staff at your hotel can arrange horseback riding for you, but if they can't, consider an equestrian jaunt at the region's biggest stables. These are headquartered at Rancho RN-23 , Arena Gorda (tel. 809/747-7356 or 7538). It supervises as many as 125 horses that are stabled at three separate "ranches," each within a reasonable distance of one another. For RD\$1,800 (\$54) an hour, you'll be guided on equestrian tours through groves of coconut palms near the beach and, in most cases, onto the beach itself. To reach it, you'll follow some clearly marked signs 3km through some of the wildest terrain left in Punta Cana, down winding sandy paths to a series of palm groves, to the site of these stables. |
| Hiking | In the National Park and along the endless beaches the walks are superb. For a special hike, there's a three day guided hike up Pico Duarte , the highest mountain in the Caribbean. |
| Cycling | The coast road is good biking terrain, but the roads are pot-holed and this is not ideal biking country! |
| Diving | There are diving opportunities with fully qualified operations in all the major resort areas of the country. |

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| CULTURE | |
| Arts | Dominican paintings are primitive, colourful and affordable |
| Music | Passing through the streets of the Dominican Republic visitors are sure to notice the handmade posters that hang from telephone poles promoting an upcoming merengue or bachata night at a nearby venue. Continue walking and it doesn't take long to realize that music acts as the soundtrack of the country and its people, often heard blaring from vehicles, stores, restaurants and houses. After sunset, the pulsing beats fill the air with life and draw locals and tourists alike toward the crowded dance floors of the world's hottest night clubs. A way of life on the island, Dominicans view dancing as an art and take pride in sharing their native movements with others. Salsa, Latin jazz and other types of dance music can be heard in the country, but are not as popular as their beloved merengue and bachata counterparts. Merengue The country's national dance, traditional merengue groups are comprised of a three-piece band including a melodeon (accordion-like |

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| | instrument), a guira (a scraped percussion piece) and a tambora (double-headed drum); however, it has expanded to incorporate other instruments such as the saxophone, trumpets, violin, flute and piano. Its tempo is characterized by an aggressive beat, requiring its dancers to swing their hips in rapid, fluid motions and make sure their feet follow suit. Early merengue's lyrics were based on sexual encounters and other socially taboo subjects, thus preventing it from becoming widely accepted. Today, merengue's lyrics cover more general topics including politics and current events. Its music has become so popular, in fact, that it is honored with two regional festivals each year. |
| Films | Cayo Levantado is the original Bacardi Island photographed in the 1970s rum campaign |
| Museums | At the southern end of the Plaza Espana in Santo Domingo is the Museo de las Casas Reales , built between 1503 and 1520, was the administrative centre of the West Indies, housing the Royal Court, Treasury and Office of the Governor. Inside, the museum's rather hodgepodge collection includes a few Taíno artefacts, Spanish navigational instruments, and an armoury donated by Trujillo with examples of weaponry used here since Columbus. Opposite the Casas Reales is the Alcazar de Colón, the fortified palace of the Columbus family, built by Diego from 1511 to 1515. |
| Festivals | <p>Dominican Republic Jazz Festival: Nov in Cabarete The Dominican Republic is world-renowned for merengue so it is no surprise that the annual Dominican Republic Jazz Festival attracts a line-up of Latin jazz performers. Concerts are held at Cabarete beach and the Gran Teatro del Cibao in Santiago. http://www.drjazzfestival.com</p> <p>Carnival is held in late Feb – Diabolo Conjuelo costumes, singing, dancing, every weekend in February.</p> <p>Merengue festivals: July in Santo Domingo – musical blowout; Oct in Pto Plata on the Malecon.</p> <p>Las Nochas de Vela: the night of the prayer festival Jan 21 mix of Catholic and African religious festivities</p> |

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| ATTRACTIONS | |
| Beaches | <p>Playa Bonita, 13km of uninterrupted beach that begins just west of Playa Las Ballenas, boasts the kind of powdery white sand you might expect to see only in tourist brochures. From Playa Bonita's entrance, a sand road provides access for four-wheel-drives and motorbikes, past a beachfront populated at most by a few small groups of people taking advantage of the isolation to swim</p> |

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| | or sunbathe naked, until, after 6km, you reach Playa Cosón, a small fishing village holding two gourmet beach shacks with tables and chairs on the sand, serving grilled, fresh-caught fish for a few pesos. |
| Wildlife | Whales: 2500 of 6000 world pop of humpbacks breed and give birth in the north on the Silver Bank; they are 50ft long and 60 tons; Dec- Mar is the season The hutia is an endemic mammal, nocturnal, 30cms, lives in caves and is rarely seen. |
| Parks | Los Haitises National Park – 1200 square kilometers of limestone hills and mangroves. Guided tours to explore the many small islands and caves of the park are offered from Samana, Sanchez, Sabana de la Mar. Pre-Colombian pictograms cover the walls of some of the caves There are 16 national parks, 67 protected areas; caimans in SW; birds: flamingos, parrots; solenodon – the Caribbean’s only insectivorous mammal, almost extinct; sea turtles, whales galore! |
| Gardens | The National Botanical Garden in Santo Domingo occupies an area of one square mile and was founded to study, preserve and investigate the varied plant life of Dominican Republic. Opened in 1976, the Botanical Garden is named after Dr. Rafael María Moscoso, the first Dominican botanist who wrote a catalog of the plants of the Spanish island in 1943. It is a sanctuary where animals and plants live in perfect harmony, with roads and trails will lead you a personal encounter with nature. It highlights the permanent exhibitions of bromeliads, ferns, palms, orchids, aquatic plants and the Japanese garden. www.jbn-sdq.org |
| Historical Buildings | Santo Domingo: Santo Domingo is the city of firsts in the Americas. Located in this metropolis are the first buildings constructed for religious, health, judicial and government purposes after the Spanish arrived. Among them, the first Cathedral of the Americas was erected (1523-1546), with its blend of Gothic and Renaissance styles. Don’t miss the beauty of the Alcázar de Colón, the oldest Viceregal residence in the Americas. It was built at the beginning of the 16th century by the son of Admiral Christopher Columbus, Don Diego Columbus. He lived there with his wife María de Toledo, the niece of the King of Spain. Columbus Park is in the centre of the city’s ancient quarter. It is an “urban living room” where everyone goes to enjoy its tree-lined streets where beautiful buildings date back several centuries. |

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| OTHER ACTIVITIES | |
| Shopping | Santo Domingo is also one of the grand shopping bazaars of the Caribbean, with such "hot" items as hand-wrapped cigars for sale virtually everywhere, along with local handicrafts. Jewelry made of larimar or amber is also much sought after. From gambling to merengue, |

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| | <p>Santo Domingo is also one of the liveliest cities in the Caribbean after dark.</p> <p>Notable cigar brands include: Santiago, Cibao Valley, Davidoff, Churchill</p> |
| Markets | <p>Most of the towns have fun markets to explore. Samana town has one of the most colourful public markets in the DR.</p> |
| Nightlife | <p>Punta Cana: Bávaro Disco, on the grounds of the Barcelo Bávaro Beach, Golf & Casino Resort (tel. 809/686-5797), has emerged as the hottest, most popular, and sexiest dance club in Punta Cana, thanks to a superb sound system. The venue is more European than North American, thanks to a heavy concentration of clients from Italy, Spain, and Holland. Painted black, with simulated stars overhead and lots of mirrors, the place is open nightly from 11pm to 5am.</p> |
| Casinos | <p>Most casinos are conveniently located within major resort complexes and are open until dawn, if not 24 hours. Dominican casinos use Las Vegas odds, so the casino's profits and player winnings are relatively the same and considered fair.</p> |

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| CUISINE | |
| Food | <p>Breakfast typically calls for a serving of "Mangu," a mix of plantains, cheese and bacon, which can be found at most hotel and resort restaurants. Mangu has been dubbed the "mashed potatoes" of the Dominican Republic and is a must-try for all visitors. Locals are also known to prepare the dish for evening meals.</p> <p>A foundation of the native diet, "La Bandera Dominicana," or the Dominican flag meal, is eaten by nearly everyone at lunch time. The most important meal of the day, La Bandera consists of rice, beans, meat, vegetables and fried plantains to ensure energy throughout the afternoon and evening.</p> <p>Another popular dish is "Sancocho," a Spanish-style stew usually served with rice. Ingredients include various roots, green plantains, avocado and typically chicken or beef, although it sometimes includes a combination of seven meats (Sancocho prieto). Goat meat, a staple in many Dominican homes, may also be used in this recipe. It offers a unique addition to the character of any dish as these animals graze on wild oregano.</p> <p>"Locrio," or Dominican rice, varies with its preparer. An adaptation of the Spanish paella, locrio is made with achiote (a colored dye produced from the seeds of the achiote plant), since saffron spice is unavailable.</p> <p>Near Samana, coconut trees decorate the landscape and provide a delectable milk sauce for fish, known as "Pescado con Coco."</p> |

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| | <p>Throughout the south central coast, "bulgur", or whole wheat, is a main ingredient in "Quipes" (ground beef wrapped in wheat) or "Tipili" (bulgur salad).</p> <p>Comida Creolla – creole cuisine blends Spanish, African, Indian and Caribbean influences; plantains, cassava, tropical fruits, mango, papaya, seafood, rice and beans; pastelitos: meat or cheese pastry turnovers; chimichurris: pork sandwiches hot off the spit; sancocho: national dish, sausage, pork, chicken, beef, goat, veg, herbs, spices in stew.</p> <p>Local beers, which are very good, are Quisqueya and El Presidente.</p> |
| <p>Rum</p> | <p>Rum production in the Caribbean is attributed to the African colonists who brought sugar cane with them to make crystallized sugar and molasses. They noticed, however, that the molasses began to ferment when left in the hot Caribbean sun and could be mixed with water to create what became known as rum.</p> <p>During the 1700s, sugar cane plantations and their by-products contributed to a booming social and economic climate which eventually drew the attention of the DR's three rum brand founders. In the mid-to-late 1800's Don Andres Brugal Montaner, Don Erasmo Bermudez and Julian Barcelo started experimenting with their own personal refining processes. Today, the Brugal, Bermúdez, and Barcelo brands of rum have become popular across the globe and are considered some of the world's best. Unlike that of Jamaica and Barbados, Dominican rum is produced through a more natural process of distillation. Aging is often done in special American white oak kegs, thus creating a sweet, hearty blend.</p> <p>Bermudez, the eldest of the Dominican rum distilleries, was established in 1852. Its first formula, Bitter Panacea, remains famous. Distilling in Santo Domingo, Bermudez boasts the Dominican's oldest aging cellar.</p> <p>Brugal, established in 1888, is located just east of Puerto Plata and produces more than one and a half million liters of white and dark rum each year. Considered the most popular distiller, Brugal offers affordable bottles of rum for sale at its bottling plant and gives guests a free rum drink. Tours are offered Monday through Friday and admission is free.</p> <p>Barcelo, established in Santo Domingo in 1930, is said to be best-liked by locals. The plant manufactures 40 thousand liters of rum per day.</p> |
| <p>Restaurants</p> | <p>Chez Palace, Punta Cana: This is the showcase restaurant of one of the biggest resort complexes in the Dominican Republic. If you're not staying at one of the Barcelo hotels, you'll have to make reservations in advance. The decor is cool and stylish, as if it were imported from a chic resort in the south of Spain. A formally dressed staff serves superb dishes that include salmon mousse in a prawn sauce, tartar of</p> |

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| | tenderloin, grilled red snapper, grouper with mustard sauce, and filet mignon with truffles and foie gras. |
| MORE INFO | DR Tourism Office: 514-499-1918 |
| Brochures | Transat Holidays and Nolitours 2012 brochures are available at travel agents. |
| Websites | www.transatholidays.com and www.nolitours.com www.godominicanrepublic.com |

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