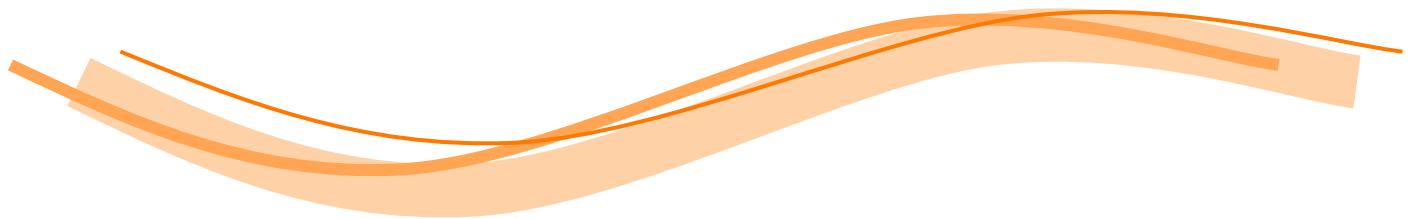




**RIVIERA MAYA,  
PALLADIUM HOTELS &  
RESORTS AND  
TRANSAT HOLIDAYS**





<p><b>PALLADIUM HOTELS AND RESORTS</b></p>	<p>Palladium Hotels and Resorts are one of the most respected names in all-inclusive luxury, offering endless dining options, reservation-free thematic restaurants, premium beverages and entertainment for all the family...all included!</p> <p>Find them in some of the best sun locations: Punta Cana in the Dominican Republic, Jamaica, Riviera Nayarit on the Pacific coast of Mexico and the Riviera Maya in Mexico's Yucatan.</p>
<p><b>History</b></p>	<p>Palladium is the luxury brand of the Fiesta Hotels and Resorts Group.</p> <p><b>SIXTIES</b> Towards the end of the sixties, the Matutes family starts its adventure in the tourism sector with the opening of two hotels in Ibiza.</p> <p><b>SEVENTIES</b> In this decade, the brand FIESTA HOTELS &amp; RESORTS is born and with it starts the enlargement of the chain in Ibiza, Minorca and Mallorca becoming one of the leaders in holiday tourism in the Spanish market.</p> <p><b>EIGHTIES</b> FIESTA HOTELS &amp; RESORTS enters the Canary Islands, opening two establishments in Tenerife and a third one in Fuerteventura.</p> <p><b>NINETIES</b> In the nineties, FIESTA HOTELS &amp; RESORTS starts its expansion in the Caribbean opening three luxurious resorts in Playa Bávaro (Dominican Republic) and an urban hotel in Santo Domingo. With this last one, FIESTA HOTELS AND RESORTS enters the city hotels sector. Not long after, two more establishments belonging to this sector are opened in Valencia and Madrid in Spain.</p> <p><b>YEAR 2002</b> The chain extends its offer in the Caribbean with two new eco-resorts in the Riviera Maya (Mexico). With the inauguration of these resorts PALLADIUM HOTELS &amp; RESORTS is born, a new brand that includes all the high class hotels of the company.</p>
<p><b>Website</b></p>	<p><a href="http://www.fiestahotelgroup.com/en/hotels/brands/palladium">http://www.fiestahotelgroup.com/en/hotels/brands/palladium</a></p>
<p><b>Spas</b></p>	<p>Restore your energy, well being and equilibrium with Palladium's indulgent spa packages. Featuring some of the largest Spa &amp; Wellness Centres in the Caribbean, Palladium Hotels and Resorts Group has a renowned collection of sumptuous spa options for a rejuvenating experience.</p>
<p><b>Dining</b></p>	<p>The range of dining options at each of the resorts is impressive and the cuisine is even more so!</p>
<p><b>Weddings</b></p>	<p>Weddings, honeymoons and vow renewals are something that Palladium knows all about. Talk to Transat Holidays and your travel agent about coordinating your needs with the resort.</p>

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<b>Grand Palladium White Sand Resort and Spa Imperial Club, Riviera Maya</b>	<p>The Grand Palladium White Sand Resort &amp; Spa is located in one of the most popular areas in the Mexican Caribbean: the Mayan Riviera. Built on a beachfront estate of over 1.220.000 m<sup>2</sup>, this resort offers amazing views of the Caribbean Sea along an 800m long beach of fine, white sands. The resort was constructed respecting the flora and fauna of the area, with all buildings blending into the surroundings. The design is an example of how the most modern and luxurious facilities can be built in perfect harmony with the natural environment of the area.</p>
<b>Location</b>	<p>Directly on beautiful Kantenah Beach in the Riviera Maya, adjacent to the Grand Palladium Colonial and Kantenah, approximately 90 km from the Cancun airport</p>
<b>Accommodation</b>	<p>This gorgeous luxury resort surrounded by magnificent gardens offers 264 beautifully appointed suites in seven 3-storey buildings.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Imperial Club Junior Suite: air-conditioning, TV, in-room safe, 1 king-size or 2 double beds, bathroom with shower, in-room double whirlpool, hairdryer, alarm clock, idock, MP3 player, coffee-maker, mini-bar, iron, living area with sofa bed, balcony or terrace, with Imperial Club inclusions, maximum occupancy 3 adults (or 2 adults and 3 kids)</li> <li>• Imperial Suite: same as above but with separate bedroom with 1 king-size bed and large living area, with Imperial Club inclusions, maximum occupancy 4 adults</li> <li>• Royal Suite Yucatan (adults only): same as above but with Royal Suite Yucatan upgrade inclusions and CD/DVD player, DVD menu and pillow menu</li> </ul>
<b>Services</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1 Adults only pool</li> <li>• 1 Salt water pool</li> <li>• Whirlpools</li> <li>• 1 Swim-up bar</li> <li>• Disco</li> <li>• WiFi (in lobby)</li> <li>• Snack bars</li> <li>• Lounge chairs and towels</li> <li>• Scuba diving centre (\$)</li> <li>• Deep sea fishing (\$)</li> <li>• Spa (\$)</li> <li>• Beauty salon (\$)</li> <li>• Shopping area (\$)</li> <li>• Internet (\$)</li> <li>• ATM (\$)</li> <li>• Medical services (\$)</li> </ul>
<b>Dining</b>	<p>Restaurants include 5 à la carte (Italian, Fish/seafood, Brazilian, Asian and Grill Barbecue) and 4 à la carte in the Colonial/Kantenah Section</p>
<b>Spa</b>	<p>The Grand Palladium White Sand Resort &amp; Spa features one of the most</p>

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	complete Spa & Wellness centres in the Mayan Riviera. In addition to offering exclusive and personalized services, the Renova Spa also features an ample gymnasium with modern exercise equipment, jacuzzi, sauna and vapor baths that will fly you to a haven of tranquility. Pamper yourself with a luxurious massage or choose amongst a great variety of beauty treatments.
<b>Activities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Snorkelling</li> <li>• Kayaking</li> <li>• Tennis</li> <li>• Badminton</li> <li>• Pool table</li> <li>• Gym</li> <li>• Sauna</li> <li>• Steam bath</li> <li>• Shuffle board</li> <li>• Mini-golf</li> </ul>
<b>Kids</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Baby Club (ages 1 to 3)</li> <li>• Kids' Club (ages 4 to 12) and Teen Club (ages 13 to 17) located at the Grand Palladium Colonial/Kantenah Section</li> <li>• Wading pool</li> <li>• Playground</li> <li>• Video games</li> <li>• Mini-disco</li> <li>• Babysitting (\$)</li> </ul>
<b>Imperial Club with Transat</b>	<p>Added benefits:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Separate check-in distinct</li> <li>• Identification bracelet</li> <li>• Dedicated room location</li> <li>• Welcome letter, bottle of tequila</li> <li>• Mini-bar restocked daily (water, soft drinks and beer)</li> <li>• Bathrobes and slippers in room</li> <li>• Beach towels in room upon arrival</li> <li>• Fruit basket upon arrival</li> <li>• Turn-down service</li> <li>• Concierge service with direct phone line</li> <li>• Minimum 5 guaranteed reservations/week for à la carte dinners</li> <li>• 24-hour snacks and beer</li> <li>• Unlimited à la carte dinners</li> <li>• Unlimited selected international drinks</li> <li>• Private cocktail party with hot &amp; cold hors d'oeuvres</li> <li>• 15% discount on selected treatments at the Renova Spa</li> <li>• Admission to the disco (drinks included)</li> <li>• Unlimited premium brand drinks available at Churchill Bar and Hemingway Bar (Kantenah lobby)</li> </ul>

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Access to all services and facilities of the Grand Palladium Colonial, Grand Palladium Kantenah and Grand Palladium Riviera</li> <li>• Welcome cocktail and cold towel upon arrival</li> </ul>
<b>Deals with Transat for 2012</b>	<p>Free honeymoon packages available          Single parent special deals available          Transat Spa Packages are available          Transat Distinction exclusive privileges          Flexible stays          Current (Feb 10<sup>th</sup>, 2012) deal with Transat to this resort:          \$1348 + \$346 taxes 1 week package from Toronto departing Feb 28</p>

<b>TRANSAT HOLIDAYS WITH PALLADIUM HOTELS &amp; RESORTS</b>	<p>Transat Holidays offer daily flights to the Dominican Republic, Jamaica and Mexico and feature <b>seven Grand Palladium resorts</b> across these destinations in their Sun Collection brochure – including three resorts in the Transat Distinction Collection with extra-special privileges for Transat Holidays guests.</p> <p><b>The Transat Distinction Collection</b> is an outstanding line of luxury hotels offered exclusively by Transat Holidays. Guests enjoy additional privileges, enhanced services and fabulous facilities – at resorts that are already renowned for their beautiful surroundings, attentive service and their wide array of activities for couples and families.</p> <p>Ask your travel agent for the Transat Holidays Sun Collection 2012 brochure and go to <a href="http://www.transatholidays.com">www.transatholidays.com</a></p>
<b>Palladium Resorts Featured with Transat</b>	<p>Jamaica: Grand Palladium Lady Hamilton (Imperial Club)          Riviera Nayarit, Mexico: Palladium Vallarta          Riviera Maya, Mexico: Grand Palladium White Sand (Imperial Club)          Riviera Maya, Mexico: Grand Palladium Kantenah          Riviera Maya, Mexico: Grand Palladium Colonial          Punta Cana, Dominican Republic: Grand Palladium Palace          Punta Cana, Dominican Republic: Grand Palladium Bavaro (Imperial Club)</p>
<b>Transat Background</b>	<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</p>

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	<p>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: <a href="http://www.transat.com/en">http://www.transat.com/en</a></p>
<b>Mission</b>	<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 leader. They see their role, ultimately, to turn holiday dreams into reality: making the vacation experience one of the most memorable ever.</p>
<b>Products</b>	<p>Packages, Cruises, Hotels, Flights, Tours, Car Rentals &amp; 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.</p>
<b>2012: Transat's 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary</b>	<p>In 2012, Transat is celebrating its 25th Anniversary – a tremendous achievement in the highly competitive world of vacation companies!</p>
<b>Winter Blues Sale Feb 2012</b>	<p>Enjoy the Transatr Winter Blues Sale to book your getaway... but hurry, as you have to book by February 29<sup>th</sup> 2012.</p> <p>Choose your gateway, and then choose from a wide selection of hotels and resorts in Cuba, Mexico, Dominican Republic and more. This Sales event is applicable to all new bookings, on select departure dates. Go to: <a href="http://www.transatholidays.com/EN/Travel/promotions?WHATID=306&amp;ID=1584&amp;ParentID=PROMOTION">http://www.transatholidays.com/EN/Travel/promotions?WHATID=306&amp;ID=1584&amp;ParentID=PROMOTION</a></p>
<b>Wider Seats</b>	<p>Air Transat has added more legroom on all their aircraft, making the journey to and from your destination even more comfortable.</p>
<b>Air Transat Upgrades</b>	<p>Air Transat has introduced its new Economy Class meal service on sun destination flights.</p> <p>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</p>

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	more complete meal tray, including a choice of two hot meals, a complimentary glass of wine and dessert.
<b>Awards</b>	<b>Agent's Choice Awards:</b> 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.
<b>Current Brochure</b>	<b>Transat Holidays Sun 2012 and Nolitours Sun 2012 brochures are available at your local travel agent and cover vacations through to October 2012.</b>
<b>Air Transat Kids Club</b>	<p>To ensure that your family vacations are fun and unforgettable from 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>
<b>Transat Club Class</b>	<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><b>Club Service</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dedicated Club attendants</li> <li>• Attentive, personalized service</li> <li>• Exclusive, spacious Club cabin</li> </ul> <p><b>Drinks &amp; Snacks</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Welcome cocktails</li> <li>• Complimentary non-alcoholic drinks, snacks and bar service</li> </ul> <p><b>Club Privileges</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased baggage allowance</li> <li>• 40 kg checked/15 kg carry-on</li> <li>• Exclusive, rapid check-in counter in most airports</li> <li>• Priority boarding</li> <li>• Practical travel items (on Europe flights)</li> <li>• Free headsets</li> <li>• Canadian newspapers</li> </ul> <p><b>Comfort &amp; Refinement</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wider, more comfortable leather seats</li> </ul>

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More leg room</li> <li>• Complimentary Seat Selection: call 1-877-872-6728</li> <li>• Choice of gourmet meals</li> <li>• Choice of wine and more</li> </ul>
<b>Option Plus</b>	<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"> <li>• Advance seat selection on roundtrip flights</li> <li>• Priority check-in at a dedicated counter</li> <li>• Priority baggage handling</li> <li>• Priority boarding</li> <li>• Complete Air Transat travel kit on flights to European destinations</li> <li>• Snacks from the On Board Bistro selection</li> <li>• Alcoholic beverages during drinks service 200ml bottle of champagne (Sun and Europe)</li> <li>• Supplementary baggage allowance up to 10 kg per flight segment**</li> <li>• Wine or beer with the meal</li> <li>• Headsets</li> </ul> <p>The cost is \$79-\$119 for southbound destinations and \$99-\$209 for European destinations as at January 2012</p>
<b>Transat and Sustainable Tourism</b>	<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><a href="http://www.airtransat.ca/en/Info/the-environment-its-everyones-business.aspx?ExitID=69&amp;ContentType=voyageur">http://www.airtransat.ca/en/Info/the-environment-its-everyones-business.aspx?ExitID=69&amp;ContentType=voyageur</a></p>
<b>Gift Certificates</b>	<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</p>

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	<p>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><b>2012 Hurricane Policy</b></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, 2012 inclusive. If the conditions stipulated in the policy are met, clients may choose one of the four options listed below:</p> <p><b>1. Travel at a later date</b>          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><b>2. Travel to another destination city</b>          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><b>3. Travel to the booked destination city</b>          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><b>4. Cancel with a full refund</b>          Travellers who choose not to travel may cancel with a full refund (excluding travel insurance premiums already paid).</p>
<p><b>Transat Excursions in Riviera Maya</b></p>	<p><b>CHICHEN ITZA</b>          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><b>COBA MAYAN VILLAGE</b>          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>

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#### 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.

#### 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!

#### CAPTAIN HOOK

All aboard – the adventure is about to begin! Enjoy a pirate show as you savour a lobster or steak dinner.

#### 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.

#### 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.

#### XEL-HA AND TULUM

Go swimming at Xel-Ha, one of the most beautiful natural aquariums in 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.

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	<p><b>NIGHTCLUB TOUR</b> 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.</p> <p><b>RIO SECRETO</b> 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.</p> <p><b>COBA MAYAN ADVENTURE</b> 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.</p> <p><b>DEEP SEA FISHING</b> 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 &amp; Release Policy is enforced by the Mexican Marine Fauna.</p> <p><b>SWIM WITH DOLPHINS</b> Make your dreams come true! Get to know these wonderful mammals as you swim and play with them in the water.</p> <p><b>JUNGLE MAYA</b> Discover the world's longest underground river, before snorkelling in the Nohoch Nah Chiich cavern. Then ride through the rain forest in an 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</p>
<p><b>Special Deals with Palladium Hotels &amp; Resorts</b></p>	<p>Transat currently has some very special deals with Palladium Hotels &amp; Resorts this winter:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- \$100 credit per room for on-board duty-free</li> <li>- Two 25-minute Swedish massages</li> <li>- Free honeymoon packages</li> <li>- Check out their website at <a href="http://www.TransatHolidays.com">www.TransatHolidays.com</a> for latest deals.</li> </ul>

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<b>RIVIERA MAYA, MEXICO</b>	<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 &amp; 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>
<b>Location</b>	Southeast Mexico, facing the Caribbean.
<b>Geography</b>	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 Biosphere Reserve.
<b>Name</b>	<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>
<b>Language</b>	Spanish, but English is widely spoken in the resort areas
<b>Currency</b>	One Canadian Dollar = 13 Mexican Pesos (10 <sup>th</sup> Feb 2012)
<b>Tipping</b>	10-15%
<b>Government</b>	Democracy
<b>Documentation</b>	Passports are required for Canadian citizens, but no Visa is necessary.
<b>Time zone</b>	Central Time
<b>Health</b>	No inoculations needed; drink bottled water to avoid 'turista', an upset stomach.
<b>Safety tips</b>	<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 19<sup>th</sup> 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</p>

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	Mexico. We seized more than 100,000 guns from criminals and 85% were bought in the US.” A sobering thought...
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<b>CLIMATE</b>	
<b>General climate</b>	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)
<b>Today’s weather</b>	27 degrees with sun and cloud (10 <sup>th</sup> Feb 2012)
<b>Best time to visit</b>	Year round (the hurricane season is July-Nov, but you would be very unlucky to encounter one of these storms)

<b>GETTING THERE</b>	
<b>Flying time</b>	<b>4 hours from Montreal and Toronto</b>
<b>Cities and Towns</b>	<p><b>Cancun</b></p> <p>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 <b>water sports</b> 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 <b>cuisine</b>, 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 &amp; B and live music venues. You will find something to suit all ages and tastes.</p> <p><b>Downtown Cancun</b> 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</p>

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– a handicrafts market – to the super modern shopping mall Plaza Las Americas.

The **Cancun Aquarium** located near Cancun's hotel zone boasts a 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;

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	<p>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.</p> <p><b>Tulum</b> - 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>
<b>Distances</b>	<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 – Tulúm .....130 km  Cancún – Cobá .....167 km  Cancún – Chichén Itza .....193 km  Cancún – Puerto Morelos ...32 km  Cancún – Xcaret .....72 km  Cancún – Xel-Há .....124 km</p>
<b>Ferries</b>	<p>You can take a ferry to <b>Cozumel</b>, 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>
<b>Car Rental</b>	All major companies are represented here.
<b>Buses</b>	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.

<b>ACCOMMODATION TYPES</b>	All Inclusive resorts predominate here, but there are smaller, pension type properties in Playa del Carmen.
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<b>LIFESTYLES</b>	
<b>Kids</b>	<p><b>Xcaret</b> 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</p>

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	<p>intervals. Plan to spend a full day.</p> <p><b>Tres Rios</b> ecoadventure park 25 minutes south of Cancún is actually a nature reserve on more than 60 hectares of land. Tres Ríos (tel. 998/887-8077 in Cancún; <a href="http://www.tres-rios.com">www.tres-rios.com</a> ) 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 <b>Xel-Ha</b> (tel. 998/884-9422; <a href="http://www.xelha.com">www.xelha.com</a> ), 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><b>Teens</b></p>	<p>In Cancún, the <b>Parque Nizuc</b> 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><b>Xplor:</b> 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><b>Selvatica:</b> 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</p>

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	<p>“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>
<b>Honeymoons &amp; Weddings</b>	<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>

<b>UNIQUES</b>	<p><b>Coba:</b> 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.</p> <p>The road to Cobá begins in Tulum and continues for 65km; there are also buses to Coba from Puerto Del Carmen</p>
<b>Surprising</b>	<p><b>Cenotes</b>, 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 <a href="http://www.alltournative.com">www.alltournative.com</a> for a guided trip into a cenote.</p>
<b>History</b>	<p><b>Tulum:</b> 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</p> <p>168km SW of Cancún</p> <p><b>Coba:</b> 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</p>

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	<p>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>
<b>Books</b>	<p><b>Frommer's Cancun, Cozumel &amp; the Yucatan 2012</b>  <b>Maya Roads by Mary Jo McConahay</b> see my review of this lovely book:  <a href="http://www.chrisrobsontravelshow.ca/Planning/ChrisBookPicks.aspx#18">http://www.chrisrobsontravelshow.ca/Planning/ChrisBookPicks.aspx#18</a></p>
<b>1000 Places to see before you die</b>	<p><b>Chichen Itza</b>, 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.</p>
<b>Must Sees</b>	<p><b>Xcaret:</b> 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.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>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.  <a href="http://www.xcaret.com">www.xcaret.com</a></p>

<b>SPORTS ACTIVITIES</b>	
<b>Golf</b>	<p>Currently this region features <b>10 quality golf courses</b>, 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.</p> <p>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</p>

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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 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**

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	<p>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.</p> <p><b>El Camaleon Mayakoba – Greg Norman</b> El Camaleon Mayakoba designed by Greg Norman stretches from the jungle to the mangroves and on to the most beautiful ocean views. 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><b>Playacar Spa &amp; Golf Club – Robert Van Hagge</b> Playacar Spa &amp; 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><b>Iberostar Playa Paraiso Golf Club – P.B. Dye</b> 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><b>Cancun Country Club</b> 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><b>Fishing</b></p>	<p><b>Sportfishing</b> 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><b>Fly fishing</b> 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</p>

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	<p>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 <b>March to August</b>; 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>
<b>Horse riding</b>	<b>Rancho Loma Bonita:</b> 30 minutes south of Cancun has a 5 hour package riding through mangrove swamps to the beach for a swim \$54
<b>Hiking</b>	The long stretch of beach by the resorts is ideal for strolls by the ocean
<b>Cycling</b>	Bikes are available for rent in Puerto del Carmen and Cancun
<b>Diving</b>	<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.</p> <p>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><b>Cyan-Ha Diving Centre</b> arranges reef and cavern diving. Many of the hotels have free introductory dives and dive shops.</p>

<b>CULTURE</b>	<p><b>Mayan Culture</b></p> <p>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><b>Mayan Architecture</b></p> <p>Mayan architecture spans many thousands of years. The most dramatic and easily recognizable are the fantastic stepped pyramids in places</p>
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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.

### **The Mayan Calendar**

The Mayan Calendar was not the original Mesoamerican calendar, but with the refinements the Mayans made, it became the most sophisticated. 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...

### **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.

### **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.

### **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.

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.

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

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	vacation. There are many tours available from your hotel or tour operator.
<b>Museums</b>	<p><b>Museo de Arte Popular Mexicano</b>, 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><b>Shipwreck Museum, Puerto Aventuras</b> - a fascinating display of 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.</p>
<b>Festivals</b>	<p><b>Santa Semana:</b> 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><b>Spring Equinox</b> 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><b>Winter Equinox</b> will be another major event and most Maya sites, as this is the day when their 5,000 year Long Cycle ends.</p> <p><b>Riviera Maya Jazz Festival</b> 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. <a href="http://www.rivieramayajazzfestival.com">http://www.rivieramayajazzfestival.com</a></p>
<b>ATTRACTIONS</b>	<p>Beautiful lagoons and bays full of colorful fish &amp; 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 &amp; 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>
<b>Beaches</b>	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.
<b>Wildlife</b>	<b>Swimming with Whale Sharks</b>

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	<p>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><b>Whale Shark Facts</b></p> <p>The whale shark is a fascinating creature to behold, with its wide mouth 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><b>Whale Shark Season</b></p> <p>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><b>Tours to Swim with Whale Sharks</b></p> <p>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>
<b>Parks</b>	<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>

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### **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 Cancún and Punta Nizuc.

### **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](http://www.contoy.org)

[www.islacontoy.org](http://www.islacontoy.org)

[www.kolumbustours.com](http://www.kolumbustours.com)

[www.birdingcontoy.com](http://www.birdingcontoy.com)

### **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.

### **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).

### **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

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	ecosystems found in the Yucatán Peninsula and the Caribbean, where both Mesoamerican and Antillean species flourish. The barrier reef extends for some 120 kilometers and covers approximately 15,000 hectares
<b>Castles/Forts</b>	<p><b>Tulum Ruins</b> 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> <p><b>Coba</b> 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>

<b>OTHER ACTIVITIES</b>	
<b>Shopping</b>	<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><b>La Isla Shopping Village, Cancun</b> 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><b>Kukulcan Plaza &amp; Luxury Avenue</b> Kukulcan Plaza &amp; 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><b>Plaza Caracol</b> Plaza Caracol is situated just north of the Cancun Convention Center. There are over 200 shops and boutiques where you will find everything</p>

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	<p>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><b>Plaza Las Americas</b> 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 are also two fantastic cinemas here showing movies in English and Spanish as well as a choice of restaurants.</p> <p>Also, <b>Fifth Avenue in Playa del Carmen</b> is a good shopping street.</p>
<b>Markets</b>	<p><b>Market 28:</b> 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>
<b>Nightlife</b>	<p>For a night out, <b>Playa del Carmen</b> 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>

<b>CUISINE</b>	
<b>Food</b>	<p>The annual <b>Mexico-Caribbean Food Festival</b>, featuring special menus of culinary creations throughout Cancun, is held each year over the first two weeks of November.</p>
<b>Drink</b>	<p><b>Tequila!</b> 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><b>Beer:</b> 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</p>

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	<p>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>
<b>Restaurants</b>	<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, and the gamut of fast-food burger places.</p> <p><b>La Cueva del Chango</b> 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><b>Yaxche:</b> 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 xcatic 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>

<b>MORE INFO</b>	
<b>Brochures</b>	Transat Holidays and Nolitours <b>Sun 2012</b> brochures are available at all travel agents.
<b>Websites</b>	<p><b>Cancún Convention &amp; Visitors Bureau:</b> <a href="http://www.cancun.info">www.cancun.info</a> - The official site of the Cancún Convention &amp; Visitors Bureau lists excellent information on events and attractions. It has an active message board of recent visitors to Cancún.</p> <p><a href="http://www.TransatHolidays.com">www.TransatHolidays.com</a> and <a href="http://www.Nolitours.com">www.Nolitours.com</a></p>

<b>AIRLINE PARTNER</b>	Air Transat
<b>Flight details</b>	Flights direct from Montreal, Toronto, Ottawa and many other Canadian airports directly to Cancun for Riviera Maya. <a href="http://www.airtransat.com">www.airtransat.com</a>

<b>PERSONAL</b>	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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