

4 excursions around Playa del Carmen on a trip to Yucatán



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By Floriane

With two weeks in the Yucatán Peninsula, we had plenty of time to enjoy the Caribbean Sea, but also to discover everything that makes this region of Mexico so charming. And around Playa del Carmen, there's no shortage of ideas for excursions.

Playa del Carmen is a very practical base from which to explore the Riviera Maya. We really like this type of holiday, which allows us to put our suitcases down for a few days and still be able to leave easily for the day. Some places can be visited in half a day, others in a full day, but all allow you to see a different side of the Yucatán.

Here are the 4 excursions around Playa del Carmen we've selected.

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Visit Chichén Itzá, the must-see excursion

Of course, it's impossible to talk about excursions around Playa del Carmen without starting with **Chichén Itzá**.

This ancient Mayan city made a huge impression on us, as much for its size as for its history. Upon arrival at the site, the **Kukulcán pyramid** immediately catches the eye. It rises from the middle of the site with an incredible presence.

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There is no set itinerary for your visit. We do, however, recommend starting with the main pyramid, **El Castillo**, ideal for taking great photos as soon as you arrive. Today, it is no longer possible to climb to its summit.

You can then follow **the ancient Mayan sacred path** to discover several of the site's major monuments:

- the **Warriors' Temple**
- the **esplanade of the Thousand Columns** representing feared warriors
- the large Pelota game (the largest in Mexico)
- **El Caracol**, the old observatory
- the **Venus platform** (used for rituals)
- the **Tzompantli**, also known as the Altar of the Dead.

□ From Playa del Carmen, you can get there by bus (about 2h30 from Playa del Carmen), you should allow a full day to enjoy the site without running. An early morning departure is clearly preferable, both to avoid the hottest hours and to visit the site in better conditions.

□ For those who prefer to be accompanied in **French when visiting Chichén Itzá**, there are organized excursions with a French-speaking guide, notably via local agencies such as [Pixan Riviera](#), departing from Playa del Carmen.

Bathing in Yucatán's cenotes

The cenotes were one of the highlights of our trip to the Yucatán.

First of all, what is a cenote? It's a natural cavity filled with fresh water. Some are completely open to the jungle, others are hidden in caves where the light filters gently through the rocks.

Around Playa del Carmen, there are many accessible cenotes. To prepare for our trip, we took a look at the ones that regularly popped up on travel blogs, and three names came up very often:

- **Cenote Azul:** the easiest to reach from Playa del Carmen. It's about 20 to 25 minutes' drive away, and can be reached by colectivo or cab. It's an **open-air cenote** with turquoise-blue waters, surrounded by dense vegetation. The atmosphere is family-friendly, with several areas for leisurely bathing.

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- **Cenote Dos Ojos:** about 45 minutes from Playa del Carmen, this cenote offers a very different atmosphere. The cenote's setting is **largely underground**, with rocky cavities and passages bathed in subdued light. Its crystal-clear water takes on beautiful bluish hues, making it a particularly impressive spot for snorkeling.
- **Cenote Sac Actun:** a journey of around an hour is required to reach it. Here, the experience is much more immersive, with **a vast underground universe of caves, limestone galleries and spectacular rock formations**. The water is transparent, sometimes almost crystalline, and the whole creates a more intimate and mysterious atmosphere, ideal if you like unusual places.

The water in the cenotes is often cool, around 24 to 26°C in the region. On paper, this sounds pleasant, but once you're there, the sensation can be more intense, especially when the cenote is shaded. So, for children or the more chilly, a little lycra might be a good idea. It's a simple detail, but one that sometimes allows you to stay in the water longer and enjoy the moment to the full.

We also recommend arriving early in the day. The atmosphere is often more peaceful, and you can better appreciate the scenery before more visitors arrive.

Spend a day on the island of Cozumel facing the Caribbean Sea

Located just opposite Playa del Carmen, Cozumel is a very easy excursion to integrate into a Riviera Maya holiday. The ferry crossing is already very pleasant.

The connection between Playa del Carmen and Cozumel is made from the city's marine terminal. The crossing takes around 45 minutes, making it easy to take a day trip.

Cozumel is incredible for its seabed. The water is a magnificent shade of blue. Even if you're not an experienced diver, you can enjoy the island's underwater riches with a mask and snorkel.

There are several places worth visiting during a day on the **island of Cozumel**. **Playa Palancar** for its beautiful beach, and **El Cielo** is one of the best-known spots

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for its translucent waters (*accessible only by boat to see stingrays and starfish*).

Accessible in 45 minutes by ferry from Playa Del Carmen.

Discover Bacalar and its blue lagoon

Bacalar is another must-see. Its famous **seven-colored** lagoon is a truly magical sight. Even though it's further away from Playa del Carmen (about 3h30 drive), we think it's well worth the effort, especially if you've got two weeks in the area.

As soon as you take your first glimpse of the lagoon, the colors are astonishing. Depending on depth, light and time of day, the water changes from turquoise to deep blue. The overall impression is one of immediate calm, almost timeless.

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To get the most out of Bacalar, a boat trip is a must. It allows you to discover several emblematic areas of the lagoon and better understand the very particular geography of the place.

Kayaking is also a great way to explore Bacalar more gently, really taking the time to observe the changing colors of the water.

Practical advice

- Lodging in the center of Playa del Carmen or near the Quinta Avenida makes it easy to reach tour departures, restaurants and the ferry to Cozumel. After a busy day, we recommend accommodation with a swimming pool, such as the [Kinbe Hotel Boutique](#).
- **Leaving early in the morning** often allows you to avoid the hottest weather and enjoy the sites in a more pleasant atmosphere.
- Slip **a small waterproof bag or pouch** into your luggage to protect your phone, papers and wallet during water excursions.
- Bring **some cash** with you, as some of the smaller sites, parking lots and on-site stands don't always accept credit cards.

All the above locations are listed on **our map**, to make it easier to find the places mentioned in the article and organize your travel.

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