

MEX:ICAN CARIBBEAN



Why Hold an Event in the Mexican Caribbean?

BY MARIA LENHART



The reasons are many.

This multi-faceted region hugging the eastern side of the Yucatan Peninsula in the state of Quintana Roo is endowed with all the elements that make for a world-class MICE destination. There's convenient international air access, state-of-the-art hotels and venues, rich cultural heritage and a stunning tropical landscape replete with white-sand beaches, jungle foliage and coral reefs beneath a turquoise sea. With destinations ranging from the sophisticated resort meccas of Cancun and Riviera Maya to secluded islands and timeless towns with intact Mayan roots, there's something to fulfill almost any meeting objective.

Getting to the Mexican Caribbean, which offers three airports (Cancun, Cozumel and Chetumal) with 116 direct flights from cities around the world, is easy, often just a few hours from the U.S. Cancun International Airport, the region's main air hub and the second largest in Mexico, offers air connectivity with nearly 40 cities across the U.S. and Canada as well as with major gateways in Europe and Latin America. Cozumel International Airport offers connections to 10 cities in the U.S. and Canada, while Chetumal Airport offers service from within Mexico.



On the ground, a diverse and top-quality range of hotel accommodations, venues and support services are equipped to handle everything from international conventions to luxury incentive programs and board retreats. In total, the Mexican Caribbean offers over 130 hotels with 1,677,450 square feet of meeting space. All-inclusive resorts as well as European Plan properties are in the mix.

In terms of technology and services, the Mexican Caribbean is on par with other major meetings destinations around the world, offering access to top-quality DMCs, corporate event planners, audiovisual, transportation, customs services, catering, simultaneous translation and more. Organizers of international congresses and exhibitions will find zero value-added tax (VAT) for these events.

Sustainability is a high priority in the Mexican Caribbean, with hotels, vendors, DMCs and other event service providers following eco-friendly practices to protect this fragile paradise. Groups who would like to participate in activities that

benefit local communities and the environment will find no shortage of opportunities to do so.

A vibrant gastronomic scene embraces the hottest international food trends as well as local specialties reflecting centuries-old culinary traditions. Equally important, warm and caring Mexican hospitality and commitment to service add to the quality of the guest experience.

What really sets the Mexican Caribbean apart, however, are its abundant and unique opportunities for outdoor recreation, teambuilding and ways to form deep and lasting connections with the culture and natural environment. Just to name a few, there's the chance to explore majestic Mayan archaeological sites on cliffs above an aqua sea, swim in the crystal waters of an underground river or *cenote*, explore flooded caves and lagoons, snorkel or dive in marine wonderlands, zipline above a jungle canopy, connect with local artists or play a round on some of the world's finest fairways.

Cancun

Located on a sun-kissed sandbar

between a picturesque lagoon and the Caribbean Sea, Cancun is a world-renowned destination for leisure travel as well as meetings and events of all sizes. Its main venue is the Cancun Convention Center, which offers 152,847 square feet of meeting and exhibition space in a prime location with spectacular Caribbean views and a short walk from accommodations and restaurants in the city's hotel zone, Boulevard Kukulcan. Among the large groups that have recently met at the center are the International Association of Pediatric Dentistry, Panamerican Ophthalmology Congress and International Society of Arthroscopy Knee Surgery and Orthopedic Sports Medicine.

Already boasting over 200 hotels with a total of over 42,000 rooms and nearly 1 million square feet of meeting space, Cancun's hotel inventory continues to grow with international brands. New and upcoming properties with large meeting facilities include the Grand Fiesta Americana Riviera Cancun, Live Aqua Beach Resort Riviera Cancun, Grand Hyatt Cancun Beach Resort, Waldorf Astoria

Cancun and Wyndham Altra Cancun All-Inclusive Resort.

With both an urban vibe and nearby access to outdoor adventures, Cancun shines with a wide variety of options for offsite events, teambuilding and activities that attendees can enjoy during free time or on extended stays before or after the meeting. Within the hotel zone groups will find an array of dining choices, nightspots, attractions and shopping malls such as La Isla Shopping Village with its hundreds of specialty stores, restaurants and theaters. The hotel zone also offers an introduction to Mayan history at the Maya Museum of Cancun.

Cancun's wide sandy beaches that beckon just beyond the hotel rooms are a prime draw for visitors as are water activities. A unique option is the Underwater Museum of Art (MUSA) where snorkelers, scuba divers and passengers on glass-bottom boats can view over 450 life-size statues set along the ocean floor. For a more adrenaline-pumping experience, there are speedboat tours through the channels of mangroves on the Nichupte Lagoon. Also popular are boat excursions to Isla Mujeres, a delightful car-free island where visitors ride golf carts to enjoy some of the region's most beautiful beaches and a temple devoted to Ixchel, the Mayan goddess of the moon.

Cancun is also a golfer's paradise with seven golf courses designed by such luminaries as Greg Norman, Robert Trent Jones, Jr. and Jack Nicklaus—all featuring spectacular settings amid mangroves and views of the sea and lagoons.

Costa Mujeres

Just north of Cancun and a half-hour from the Cancun International Airport, Costa Mujeres is the Mexican Caribbean's newest tourist spot, ideal

for small groups seeking a relaxing atmosphere in an exquisite setting of mangroves, lush vegetation and pristine beaches. Accommodations are in 11 exclusive luxury hotels, offering a total of 90,269 square feet of meeting space as well as fine dining, spas, wellness centers and other upscale amenities.

Attendees will also find the Greg Norman-designed Playa Mujeres Golf

international and national events, there are over 50 group-friendly hotels, ranging from beachfront all-inclusive resorts to boutique hotels and secluded lodges, offering a total of 342,954 square feet of meeting space. Recently opened or upcoming hotels include the Riviera Maya EDITION, St. Regis Kanai Resort Riviera Maya, Hilton Tulum Riviera Maya and Conrad Tulum Riviera Maya.

RIO SECRETO



Club, beachside seafood restaurants at Puerto Juarez and the peaceful Isla Blanca, a favorite spot for kite surfing. At the El Meco archaeological site, there are spectacular views of the coast from its main structure, El Castillo.

Riviera Maya

South of Cancun on an 80-mile stretch of coastline from Puerto Morelos to Tulum, Riviera Maya draws meeting groups with its blend of luxury resorts, abundant teambuilding opportunities, outdoor adventures, natural wonders, dining and archaeological sites. Equipped to handle large

At the heart of Riviera Maya is Playa del Carmen, a lively resort town where a five-mile-long pedestrian walkway called Fifth Avenue is lined with art galleries, specialty shops, boutique hotels, restaurants and clubs. Another major town is Tulum, most famous for its stunning archaeological site where the vestiges of a Mayan city of over 60 structures are spread over cliffs above the Caribbean Sea. Elsewhere in Tulum groups will find a top-quality culinary scene that has drawn chefs from around the world and an expanding choice of event-friendly hotels and resorts.

While the Riviera Maya offers

some of the best beaches and golf courses to be found anywhere, its opportunities for outdoor adventures, including snorkeling and swimming in more than 2,500 *cenotes* and flooded caves, are truly unique. Group-friendly adventure parks offer hiking, ATV drives through the jungle, ziplining, rafting and much more. Among the region's most wondrous natural areas is the Sian Ka'an Biosphere Reserve, over 600,000 acres of protected lands for tropical plants and wildlife, including the rare and elusive jaguar.

Cozumel

The largest island in the Mexican Caribbean and a renowned diving spot, Cozumel features an impressive array of hotels and venues for small and mid-sized meetings. These include a convention center accommodating up to 1,279 attendees and 15 hotels with a total of 38,617 square feet of meeting space. Its international airport offers service from Mexico City, Toronto, Chicago, Dallas, Houston, Philadelphia and other North American cities. The island is also accessible by ferry from Playa del Carmen.

With its abundant wildlife and natural areas, Cozumel offers a variety of immersive experiences for meeting attendees, including the chance to snorkel with manta rays or visit a turtle camp to help release endangered sea turtles back into the ocean. Wildlife, including crocodiles and some 224 bird species, can be observed on a swamp boat excursion at Punta Sur Park. Mayan history and heritage abound in Cozumel, where sites include San Gervasio, an important place for pilgrimage and trading in ancient times.

Grand Costa Maya

Located in the southern part of the region near the Belize border, Grand

Costa Maya is one of the Mexican Caribbean's hidden gems. Chetumal, gateway to the region as well as the state capital of Quintana Roo, offers group-friendly hotels and the Chetumal International Business and Convention Center, a stunning modern facility with a Mayan-inspired design that accommodates events for up to 2,400 people with a total of 36,597 square feet of meeting space. The city's waterfront Boulevard Bahia is a prime spot for enjoying sunsets,

marine reserve that is part of the world's second largest barrier reef, an underwater wonderland of tropical fish, turtles and sunken Spanish and English galleons dating back to the 16th century. Bacalar, designated one of Mexico's "Magic Towns," offers Spanish colonial history, charming boutique hotels and the Lagoon of the Seven Colors, a spectacular setting for kayaking, boat rides, swimming and snorkeling.

As its name suggests, some of

BARCELÓ RIVIERA MAYA



Mexican street foods like crispy crepes called *marquesitas* and live entertainment.

A four-hour drive from Cancun, Chetumal can also be reached by air from Cancun, Mexico City and Guadalajara.

Chetumal and its surroundings provide myriad ways to enjoy marine sanctuaries, jungle preserves, Mayan culture and leisure activities that even include casino gaming in the nearby Commercial Free Zone in Belize. Mahahual, a cruise port and diving mecca, is situated on a

Grand Costa Maya's most fascinating sites are those left behind by the Maya, including Chacchobén, Oxtankah, Dzibanché, Kinichná and Kohunlich, the latter with its Temple of the Masks, a 4th-century pyramid with stairways lined with carved stone masks. ■

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130 hotels with over **1,677,450 sq. ft. of meeting space**, beautiful natural sceneries, great air connectivity and easy budgeting are just a few of the things that make the **Mexican Caribbean** the perfect place for holding your meetings.



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