



Isla Mujeres

📍 998 / POP 12,600

Includes ➔

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Best Places to Eat

- ➔ Mañana (p81)
- ➔ Olivia (p82)
- ➔ Mininos (p81)
- ➔ Angelo (p82)
- ➔ Pita Amore (p81)

Best Places to Stay

- ➔ Poc-Na Hostel (p78)
- ➔ Casa El Pio (p79)
- ➔ Hotel Villa Kiin (p81)
- ➔ Hotel Rocamar (p79)
- ➔ Hotel Na Balam (p81)

Why Go?

Some people plan their vacation around Cancún and pencil in Isla Mujeres for a whirlwind visit. But Isla Mujeres is a destination in its own right, and it's generally quieter and more affordable than what you get across the bay.

Sure, there's quite a few ticky-tack tourist shops, but folks still get around by golf cart and the crushed-coral beaches are even better than those of Cozumel and Holbox. As for the calm, turquoise-blue water of Isla Mujeres, well, you really just have to see it for yourself.

There's just enough here to keep you entertained: snorkel or scuba dive, visit a turtle farm, or just put on the sunglasses and open that book you've been dying to finish. Come sunset, there's plenty of dining options, and the nightlife scene moves at a relaxing island pace.

When to Go

- ➔ For the experience of a lifetime, go between June and September and you can snorkel with 15-ton whale sharks in nearby waters.
- ➔ It's quite a sight to watch sea turtles come ashore for nesting season in August and September, and if you want to get a closer look at the little fellas you can always drop by the island's turtle farm.
- ➔ Hotels tend to get booked up during the winter high season (December to April), so you're better off visiting in November when you'll find vacancies and low-season discounts to boot.

History

A glimpse at the sunbathers on the beach will have you thinking the moniker 'Island of Women' comes from the bikini-clad tourists; however, the name Isla Mujeres goes at least as far back as Spanish buccaneers, who (legend has it) kept their lovers in safe seclusion here while they plundered galleons and pillaged ports on the mainland. An alternate

theory suggests that in 1517, when Francisco Hernández de Córdoba sailed from Cuba and arrived here to procure slaves, the expedition discovered a stone temple containing clay figurines of Maya goddesses; it is thought Córdoba named the island after the icons.

Today some archaeologists believe that the island was a stopover for the Maya en route to worship their goddess of fertility, Ixchel, on Isla Cozumel. The clay idols are thought to have represented the goddess. The island may also have figured in the extensive Maya salt trade, which extended for hundreds of kilometers along the coastline.

Sights

Museo Capitán Dulché

MUSEUM

(Map p78; www.capitandulche.com; Carretera a Garrafón, Km 4.5; ☺ 10am-7pm) And you thought Isla Mujeres had no culture. Here you not only get a maritime museum detailing the island's naval history but there's also a sculpture garden dotted with dozens of grinding stones. There also happens to be one of the best beach clubs here – and we're not just saying that because of the cool boat bar.

Punta Sur

LOOKOUT/GARDEN

(ruins admission M\$30) At the southern point you'll find a lighthouse, sculpture garden and the worn remains of a temple dedicated to Ixchel, Maya goddess of the moon and fertility. Various hurricanes have pummeled the ruins over time and there's now little to see other than the sculpture garden, the sea and Cancún in the distance. Taxis from town cost about M\$80.

Beaches

Playa Norte

BEACH

(Map p80) **FREE** Once you reach Playa Norte, the island's main beach, you won't want to leave. Its warm shallow waters are the color of blue-raspberry syrup and the beach is crushed coral. Unlike the outer beach, Playa Norte is safe and the water is only chest-deep even far from shore.

Playa Secreto

BEACH

(Map p80; 🚫) The lagoon separating the Avalon Reef Club from the rest of the island has a shallow swimming spot that's ideal for kids.

Playa Lancheros

BEACH

(Map p78) About 5km south of town and the southernmost point served by local buses, this beach is less attractive than Playa



Isla Mujeres Highlights

- 1 Drop by the **Isla Mujeres Turtle Farm** (p77) and say hello to your new flipped friends
- 2 Relax on the white sands of **Playa Norte** (p76) and swim in the shallow, crystalline waters
- 3 Rent a golf cart or scooter and feel the warm ocean wind in your face as you explore other parts of the island
- 4 Head out on a boat to go snorkeling with **whale sharks** (p77), the largest fish in the world
- 5 Dive into the deep Caribbean blue and explore an underwater world of sunken ships and shark caves (p77)