



Isla Cozumel

📍 987 / POP 80,000

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Best Places to Eat

- ➔ Kinta (p94)
- ➔ La Cocay (p94)
- ➔ Guido's Restaurant (p94)
- ➔ La Choza (p93)
- ➔ Camarón Dorado (p93)

Best Places to Stay

- ➔ Hotel B Cozumel (p92)
- ➔ Hostelito (p91)
- ➔ Hotel Villas Las Anclas (p92)
- ➔ Ventanas al Mar (p92)
- ➔ Hotel Mary Carmen (p92)

Why Go?

Cozumel is too resilient, too proud to let itself become just another cheesy cruise-ship destination. Leaving the tourist area – and the gringo-friendly souvenir shops – behind, you see an island of quiet cool and genuine authenticity. Garages still have shrines to the Virgin, there's a spirited Caribbean energy, and of course there are some holiday things to do, such as diving some of the best reefs in the world.

While diving and snorkeling are the main draws, the town square is a pleasant place to spend the afternoon, and it's highly gratifying to explore the less-visited parts of the island on a rented scooter or convertible bug. The coastal road leads to small Maya ruins, a marine park and captivating scenery along the unforgettable windswept shore.

When to Go

- ➔ The festive Carnaval celebration in February brings live music acts and dancers festooned with feathers out into the streets. It's not Rio de Janeiro, but it sure is a hoot.
- ➔ In late April and early May folks in the town of El Cedral pay tribute to Caste War refugees with a fun-filled fair featuring rides, rodeos and traditional dance, including the time-honored Dance of the Pigs' Heads.
- ➔ If you're planning a trip around diving and snorkeling you might want to visit March through May, when you don't have to worry about hurricanes or strong winter winds.

History

Maya settlement here dates from AD 300. During the post-Classic period, Cozumel flourished as a trade center and, more importantly, a ceremonial site. Every Maya woman living on the Yucatán Peninsula and beyond was expected to make at least one pilgrimage here to pay tribute to Ixchel, the goddess of fertility and the moon, at a

temple erected in her honor. Archaeologists believe this temple was at San Gervasio, a bit north of the island's geographical center.

At the time of the first Spanish contact with Cozumel (in 1518, by Juan de Grijalva and his men), there were at least 32 Maya building groups on the island. According to Spanish chronicler Diego de Landa, a year later Hernán Cortés sacked one of the Maya



Isla Cozumel Highlights

- 1 Plunge into the deep blue and explore some of the world's best **dive sites** (p89), offering the likes of drift diving and imposing underwater walls that descend into the Caribbean.
- 2 Rent a scooter, bike or car to cruise the **coastal road** (p88) to Maya

ruins and beaches along Cozumel's wild, windswept southeastern side.

- 3 Spend an evening hanging out at a bar or sidewalk restaurant in the buzzing town plaza of **San Miguel de Cozumel** (p86).
- 4 Learn all kinds of interesting tidbits about the

island's geology and Maya history at the **Museo de la Isla de Cozumel** (p86).

- 5 Visit ecopark **Parque Punta Sur** (p86), where you can swim at a beach with a shallow reef and take a boat tour of a lagoon with migratory birds and crocs.