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The Yucatán Peninsula Today

Tourism is one of the driving forces behind life in the Yucatán, Mexico's most visited destination. For better or worse, the industry helps shape politics, economics and many of the region's important social and environmental issues. And because the peninsula is unquestionably one of the safest and most visitor-friendly places in all of Mexico, the tourism economy is thriving like never before.

Best on Film

Alamar (To the Sea; 2009) Moving docudrama about a Maya father-son relationship; Mexican filmmaker Pedro González-Rubio shot it at Banco Chinchorro, off the Mahahual coast.

Before Night Falls (2000) Partially filmed in Mérida, this Oscar-nominated biography of Cuban poet Reinaldo Arenas, played by Javier Bardem.

Che! El Argentino (2009) Campeche city stood in as Santa Clara, Cuba, for Steven Soderbergh's biopic about Argentine Ernesto 'Che' Guevara.

Toro Negro (Black Bull; 2005) Produced by Oscar winner Alejandro González Iñárritu, this Mexican documentary about a self-destructive amateur bullfighter was filmed in several Yucatán Maya communities.

Best in Print

Time Among the Maya (Ronald Wright; 1989) A travel memoir that explores past and present-day Maya culture and identity.

Incidents of Travel in Yucatán (John Lloyd Stephens; 1848) American writer Stephens recounts his adventures with English artist Frederick Catherwood in this classic travel book.

The Art of Mexican Cooking (Diana Kennedy; 1989) Food expert Diana Kennedy's definitive cookbook features mouth-watering recipes from the Yucatán and other Mexican regions.

The Yucatán Perserveres

The Yucatán has proved time and again that it can resist even the mightiest of blows to its flourishing tourism economy. In recent times, the peninsula has seen category 5 hurricanes raze entire cities, a massive viral outbreak and a crippling economic crisis.

In 2005, the northern parts of the Quintana Roo coast, including Cancún, Isla Mujeres and Isla Holbox, were dealt a devastating one-two punch by Hurricanes Emily and Wilma (the latter is the most intense Atlantic hurricane on record). In addition to leaving behind billions of dollars' worth of property damage, the storms wiped out Cancún's pristine white beaches and left much of Holbox under water. Dozens of lives were lost and it took years to rebuild many towns.

Another major crisis struck the peninsula in 2009, when the swine-flu outbreak drastically affected visit numbers to the Yucatán's resort areas. That, coupled with a worldwide economic crisis, made life extremely difficult for tourism-dependent communities throughout the region.

Around the same time as the swine-flu epidemic, the industry was facing another huge problem: drug-related violence, or, better said, misconstrued perceptions of the violence. Mexico's decade-long drug war has claimed more than 100,000 lives, but throughout it all the peninsular region has remained a safe haven. The Yucatán is actually safer than most US cities, but news of the drug war continues to scare away potential visitors. The truth is drug gangs rarely target tourists, not just in the Yucatán but in Mexico in general.