

# CANCÚN & THE YUCATÁN

ENCOUNTER

**GREG BENCHWICK**

Cancún & the Yucatán Encounter

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## HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

### Color-Coding & Maps

Color-coding is used for symbols on maps and in the text that they relate to (eg all eating venues on the maps and in the text are given a green knife and fork symbol). Each beach and town also gets its own colour, and this is used down the edge of the page and throughout that beach and town section.

Shaded yellow areas on the maps denote areas of interest – for their historical significance, their attractive architecture or their great bars and restaurants. We encourage you to head to these areas and just start exploring!

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## GREG BENCHWICK

Greg first visited the Yucatán Peninsula in the early '80s, when his old man took him and his sister to the tiny coastal village of Akumal. They snorkeled with barracuda and parrot fish in the Laguna Yal-Kú, took a nauseating ferry over to Cozumel and even visited the remote ruins of Cobá. While his present-day journeys will never compete with the rosy-hued memories of the past, Greg's been coming back ever since... though he swears the Nohoch Mul pyramid in Cobá has shrunk. Greg's work has been featured in *Condé Nast Traveller*, *National Geographic Traveler*, *Wild Blue Yonder* and in over a dozen guidebooks on Latin America, including Lonely Planet's *Cancún, Cozumel & the Yucatán*. To see videos and podcasts from Greg's adventures, check out his website [www.soundtraveler.com](http://www.soundtraveler.com).



## GREG'S THANKS

An enduring thanks goes out to the people of Mexico, who make every journey 'down south' a pleasure. Big props also go out to the people who helped with my local-voice interviews, including Juan de la Rosa, Deborah Felixson, Guadalupe Quintana and Iñaki Iturbe. And, of course, thanks and never-ending love to the two most beautiful women in the world: my wife and my mother.



At play on the beach at Playa Norte (p58), Isla Mujeres

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## >THIS IS CANCÚN & THE YUCATÁN

An area of remarkable diversity and eye-popping natural beauty, the Yucatán Peninsula – and its crowning resort developments in Cancún and the Riviera Maya – offers something for just about everyone in your crew.

For bacchanalians and beach lovers, there are the devilish nightclubs and angelic white sands of Cancún and Playa del Carmen. Divers and adventurers will salivate at the sight of the translucent waters and massive coral arrays of the Mesoamerican reef – the second-largest barrier reef in the world. For everybody else, there are lost Maya ruins to explore, hammocks to test, Coronas to drink, and long-forgotten beaches to discover.

At the heart of it all is Cancún. As Mexico's most-visited resort area (this little spit of sand and sun draws in well over four million visitors each year), Cancún is many things to many people. Some say it's the best beach destination on the planet, while others find the over-the-top development to be crass and tacky. Truth be told, Cancún is all this and a whole lot more.

But there's more on offer along this coast than just the resorts of Cancún and the Riviera Maya. Out in the waters of the Caribbean, you have spectacular beaches and world-class diving on Isla Mujeres and Cozumel.

Further south along the Quintana Roo (*kin-tah-nah roh*) coast, you have the Euro-chic lounges of Playa del Carmen, the laid-back rhythms and spectacular coastal ruin at Tulum, plus a handful of azure-blue cenotes (limestone sinkholes perfect for swimming or diving) and lost lagoons found near cozy beach towns like Akumal and Mahahual.

Around here, the past and present intermingle. You'll see it in the towering temples at archaeological sites like Chichén Itzá and Cobá, in the cobblestone streets of the colonial centers of Mérida and Valladolid, and in the villages and culture of southern Mexico's native people, the Maya.

**Top left** Maya people carrying religious banners from Convento de San Antonio de Padua (p114) **Top right** A Mexican woman in traditional dress (p143) **Bottom** La Parrilla (p49), one of Cancún's authentic Mexican restaurants