



Costa Maya & Southern Caribbean Coast

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Off the Beaten Track

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Best Places to Eat

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Why Go?

The Southern Caribbean Coast, or the Costa Maya as the tourist brochures call it, is the latest region to be hit by the development boom. But if you're looking for a quiet escape on the Mexican Caribbean, it's still the best place to be.

Stretching about 100km south of Sian Ka'an biosphere reserve down to the small town of Xcalak, you'll find many surprises along the way, such as the mesmerizing Laguna Bacalar, aka the 'lake of seven colors.' East of Bacalar, the tranquil fishing towns of Mahahual and Xcalak offer great beach-bumming, bird-watching and diving opportunities – residents in both spots put a premium on sustainable development, and it shows.

In the interior, the seldom-visited ruins of Dzibanché and Kohunlich seem all the more mysterious without the tour vans. For both the ruins and trips down south to Belize, Quintana Roo's state capital Chetumal is a great jumping-off point.

When to Go

➔ Don't miss the Caribbean-flavored Carnaval (p135) street festival in February in the Quintana Roo state capital, Chetumal. It's definitely one of the best fiestas of the year on the southern coast.

➔ The weeklong cultural festival Cruzando Fronteras (p130) is held in late February and/or early March in the town of Mahahual; it's still low season and early enough to avoid spring-break crowds.

➔ A visit from early- to mid-December has several advantages: hurricane season has passed, the weather has cooled considerably and many great hotel deals can be found ahead of the holiday season.



Costa Maya & Southern Caribbean Coast Highlights

1 Dive at **Banco Chinchorro** (p129), the largest coral atoll in the western hemisphere and a fascinating ship graveyard.

2 Take a refreshing dip in the 90m-deep **Cenote Azul** (p133), then bask on **Laguna Bacalar** (p133),

one of the most beautiful lakes that you'll ever set your eyes on.

3 Go snorkeling, fishing or bird-watching in **Mahahual** (p129), or simply chill at a boardwalk bar or restaurant in this laid-back coastal town.

4 Escape to the remote beach village of **Xcalak** (p131) for quality R&R, diving and fishing.

5 Beat your own path to a series of seldom-visited **Maya ruins** (p139) west of the Quintana Roo capital Chetumal.