

Isla Mujeres & Holbox

Best Things To See & Do



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Isla Mujeres & Holbox

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1. Introduction to Isla Mujeres and Holbox

Mexico's Quintana Roo region is a tourist magnet for people looking for white sand beaches, turquoise water, and Mexican food. At its center, Cancun is a busy and noisy metropolis with a population of over 700,000 people.

As soon as you leave Cancun, the hectic goes away. Towns to the south, like Playa del Carmen, Tulum, Akumal, Puerto Aventuras, and the island of Cozumel, were once quiet fishing villages, but are nowadays becoming exceedingly popular with vacationers and expats, and thus increasingly touristy.



People looking for deeply relaxing vacations off the main beaten path are turning towards Isla Mujeres and Isla Holbox for more authentic Mexican vacations.

Isla Mujeres has become quite popular in the last several years, but still has some authenticity, you just need to look for it. And, it has [Playa Norte](#), which was voted Mexico's best beach many times.

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Holbox is still the off-the-beaten path vacation spot that some people are craving for. On Holbox, you can get around with English, but it helps to speak Spanish and cash is still king.



2.1 DISCLAIMER

In this guide I am doing my best to give you the most accurate information. Over time, however, prices, times, and even attractions are subject to change. Therefore, I and backpackandsnorkel.com cannot be held responsible for the experiences of users while traveling. I strongly suggest that you write or call the attractions you plan to visit for confirmation when you make your travel plans.

Also, please stay alert, be aware of your surroundings and keep an eye on your belongings. Pickpockets and other criminals can easily ruin even the best planned vacation.

2.2 COPYRIGHT

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3. Isla Mujeres

3.1 Why you should visit Isla Mujeres

Isla Mujeres in Mexico has stolen our hearts, and we consider it to be our personal paradise!



It features white sand beaches ([Playa Norte](#) is supposedly Mexico's best beach), turquoise water and authentic Mexican food. Playa Norte has good swimming, good snorkeling - even for beginners - and good sunbathing.

The island is a short ferry ride from Cancun, but really a world away. Cancun is busy, somewhat hectic and a tourist trap. Isla Mujeres is relaxed and much more authentic. With Playa Norte, it has Mexico's best beach (that's what they say and I totally believe that is true), it has a touristy downtown area but also plenty of authentic Mexican food that you can buy for very little money.

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3.2 What is the best time to visit Isla Mujeres

The most pleasant weather on Isla Mujeres is in the **dry season from December through March**. The temperatures are warm, the ocean temperature is good for swimming and snorkeling, and the water is clear.

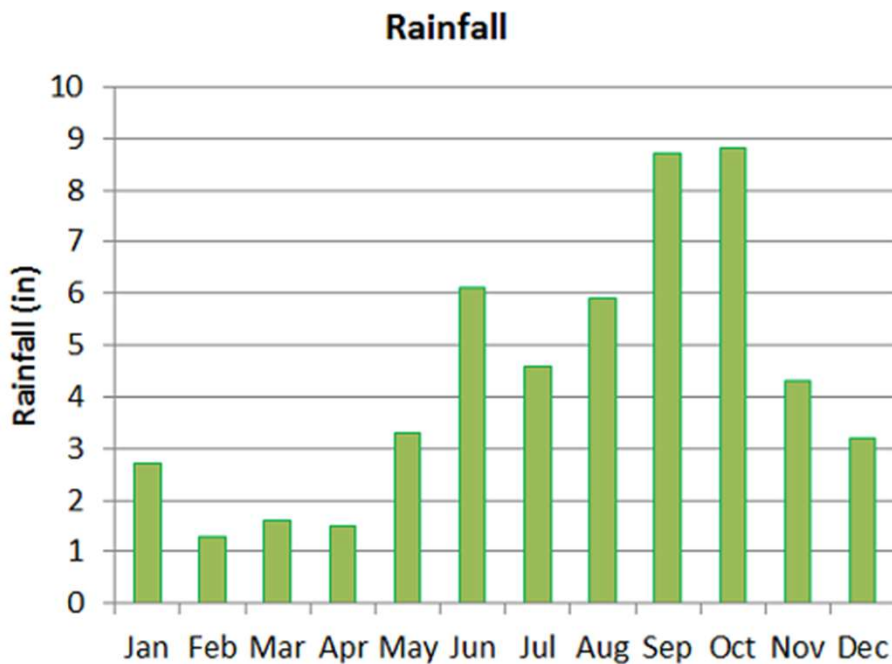
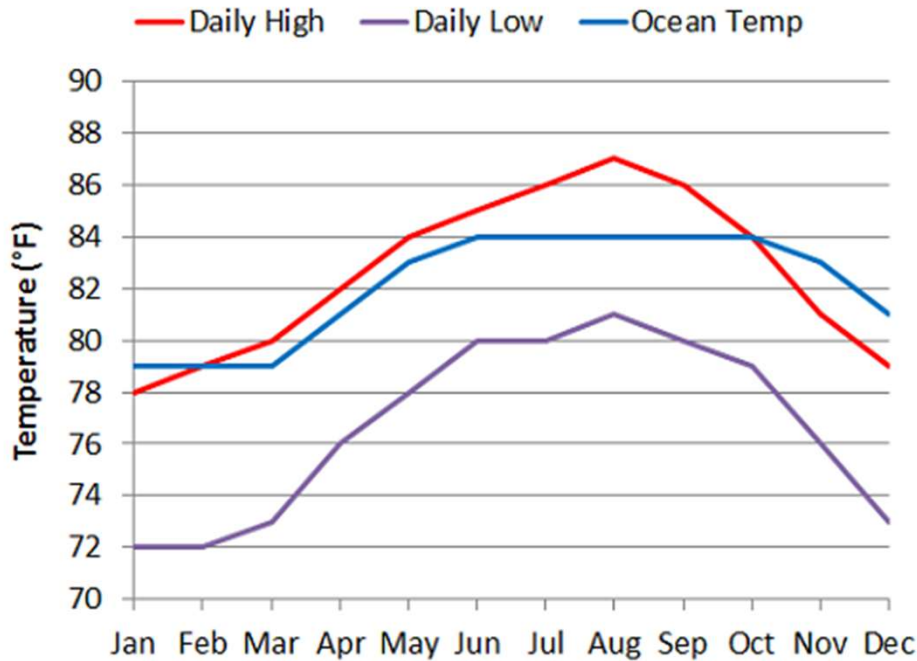
During the **rainy season from May through mid-September**, expect frequent and sometimes intense rain showers, and sometimes hurricanes. The rainy season is by no means a washout. You will often have multiple days in a row with blue skies and without any rain. And even if it rains, the sky often clears up within an hour and you can enjoy beautiful weather. The humidity, however, is higher during the rainy season, and the ocean hazier, which makes snorkeling a little less attractive. During that time, the water temperature is at its highest, and real warm.

The rainy season is also the **whale shark season**. Whale sharks are the largest living fish species on the planet, with a maximum length of 62 ft (19m). Even though they are sharks, they are slow-moving, and feed by filtering water for plankton, squid, and small fish. From late May until the end of September, when the water is above 70 F (21 C), whale sharks come close to Isla Mujeres, and there are many tour companies that offer swimming and snorkeling with whale sharks. These tours are strictly regulated, and everybody only gets a short amount of time in the water with them. As a matter of fact, by law, tour boats must coordinate so that there are never more than 2 tourists per boat in the water with the whale sharks.

Diving with whale sharks is not permitted.

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The climate that you can expect for Isla Mujeres during your visit is shown here:



3.3 How to get to Isla Mujeres?

Unless you have a private yacht, or hire a private water taxi (like [Isla Fun Tours](#), [Sea Hawk Divers](#), [DC Explorer](#)), you will need to take the ferry from Cancun to Isla Mujeres. The airport on Isla Mujeres is not used for commercial flights.

There are two ferry options:

1. The [Ultramar ferry](#) leaves from the Puerto Juarez pier ([map](#)) in the north of Cancun.
2. The new [Xcaret Xailing](#) catamaran leaves from Embarcadero Isla Mujeres, by Xcaret near the northern entrance to the Zona Hotelera (hotel zone) ([map](#)).

Both ferries arrive at the same ferry terminal on Isla Mujeres.

You will probably fly to Cancun airport, which is an excellent point to start your Isla Mujeres vacation. If you hold a US or Mexican passport, then you are in luck. You can use the automated immigration gates, where you scan your passport, get a photo taken by the machine and a ticket printed that you need when you depart Mexico – so do not lose it. The entire process is super-fast, and can get you through immigration in 5min. After immigration, you go through customs and then exit the secure area.

3.4 How to get around on Isla Mujeres?

The Ultramar ferry and Xcaret Xailing catamaran land in the El Centro area in the northern part of the island, just a few feet away from [Playa Centro](#) and a 5-10min walk from [Playa Norte](#).

If you stay in El Centro ,or on Playa Norte, then you can easily walk to your hotel. The northern part of the island is easily walkable and you can walk from one end to the other in about 20min.

Should you need transportation, the main taxi stand of Isla Mujeres is right next to the ferry pier, and there are plenty of taxis. A ride in the El Centro area costs around 100 Pesos at the time of writing, about 150 to the middle of the island and 200 to the southernmost part Punta Sur. You may need to negotiate to get these rates.

If you need transportation on Isla Mujeres, here are your options:

1) **Bicycle Rental companies on Isla Mujeres**

You can either bring your bicycle to Isla Mujeres, or rent a bike on the island. If you want to take your bike to Isla Mujeres, then you will need to use the UltraCarga ferry which departs from Punta Sam. For more information, please go to the '[Cars and Rental Cars on Isla Mujeres](#)' section in this guide.

There are several bike rentals on Isla Mujeres. The northern El Centro part of Isla Mujeres is perfectly flat. The southern part of the island is flat near the coast, but has some fairly steep hills that lead into the island's interior. Because of the hot temperatures and humidity, riding a bicycle can be exhausting.

It is important to inspect your bike and reject it if it is not in good working order, or if it has large rusty spots – most rental bikes will have some rusty spots due to the harsh climate. It is not unheard of that bikes just break at their rusty spots during your ride.

The more popular bicycle rental companies that we are aware of, but have never used, are:

- BiCi Express in Colonias (middle of the island) ([map](#)), open Mon-Sat 9:30am-8pm
- Rentadora Rasta in El Centro (downtown area) ([map](#)), open daily 9am-5pm

At the time of writing, rates were about 250 Pesos (US\$14) per 24h.

2) Bus

([reviews](#), [website](#))

There are four bus lines on Isla Mujeres. For tourists, only lines 3 and 4 are of interest, as they connect all the main attractions on the island for an exceptionally low fare. Honestly, I like riding the bus, as it is very convenient.



At the time of writing, a single fare costs 20 Pesos (US\$1), regardless how far you ride. You can buy a day pass for unlimited rides from 6am until 10 pm for 175 Pesos (US\$10).

Please be advised that all buses will be back at the depot by 10 pm, so if you are trying to get on a bus near closing time, the driver may not stop, or may not get back to the final destination and maroon you somewhere.

You pay the driver when you get on the bus. Only cash (Pesos) is accepted, and the driver will typically have change. There is no air condition on the bus, but the windows and doors are open all the time.

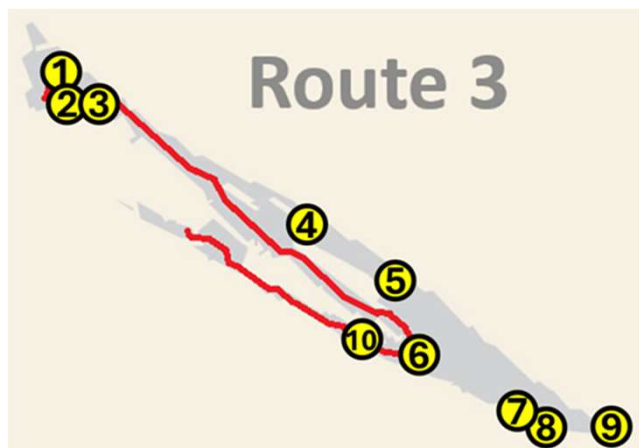
Buses officially come every 20min, but since we are on island time, this can sometimes stretch out to 30min.

There are only two set bus stations: one on Playa Centro ([map](#)) and one directly south of the Ultramar ferry ([map](#)). You can depart or board the bus anywhere on the bus route. Just wave your hand at the driver from the roadside to board, or let the driver know that you want to exit.

Almost every bus has a number in the upper right-hand side of the windshield – this is the bus number. The bus line is either on a sign in the lower left-hand side of the windshield or on a moving display in the upper left-hand side of the windshield. If there is no sign on the left, then this is a combination bus that will follow the line 3 route first and then continue on the line 4 route back to Playa Centro.

If you are in doubt, just ask the bus driver if the bus goes to your destination.

Here are the route maps of lines 3 and 4:



- 1 = [Playa Norte](#) / Convention Center (currently not used)
- 2 = [Playa Centro](#) (official stop)
- 3 = [Ultramar Ferry](#) (official stop)
- 4 = [Mango Cafe](#)
- 5 = [Rainbow Stairs](#)
- 6 = [Ramon Bravo Prieto Monument](#)
- 7 = [Kin Ha Beach Club](#)
- 8 = [Garrafon de Castilla](#)
- 9 = [Punta Sur](#)
- 10 = [Icebar Mexico](#)

Please be advised that the Playa Norte bus stop by the convention center is currently not being used. Buses start and end at Playa Centro.

3) Cars and Rental Cars on Isla Mujeres

There are no rental car companies on Isla Mujeres as far as I know. But you can bring your car or rental car to Isla Mujeres. Just be advised that it can be difficult to find parking in the northern part of the island, especially near Playa Norte after 10am.

The Ultramar ferry does not transport cars, but UltraCarga ([website](#)) does. UltraCarga departs from Punta Sam ([map](#)), about 4 miles (6 km) north of Puerto Juarez, and it lands at Terminal Maritima UltraCarga ([map](#)) in Isla Mujeres.

At the time of writing, there are 3-4 departures per day and a single ride ticket for a sedan including the driver is 460 Pesos (US\$25). Additional adults pay 250 Pesos (US\$14) per person. Discounted rates for children are available.

If you bring your bicycle or motorcycle from Cancun to Isla Mujeres, then you pay, at the time of writing, 180 Pesos (US\$10) for the motorcycle including the driver, and 140 Pesos (US\$8) for the bicycle including the rider.

4) Golf cart rental companies on Isla Mujeres

Golf cars and taxis are the most popular mode of transportation among tourists on Isla Mujeres. Nowadays, there seem to be golf cart rentals around every corner in El Centro.

Some companies have long opening hours and some even deliver to your hotel. All of them rent by hour, by day, or for multiple days.

When you decide on a golf cart rental company, look at the carts they are renting. Do they look old, beaten up, or have worn tires? If so, then you may want to choose another company. It is not unheard of that sometimes golf carts break down, and then you may be on your own, as they may not pick up the phone when you call them.

The two reputable golf cart rental companies that generally have the best reviews are:

- Mega Ciro's de Caribe Golf Rental ([map](#), [reviews](#), [website](#))
- Indios Golf Carts ([map](#), [reviews](#), [website](#))

Be advised that, when driving a golf cart:

- it is illegal to drink alcohol and drive
- it is illegal to have open alcohol containers while driving
- it is illegal to allow anyone under the age of 16 years to drive
- it is illegal to make calls on your cell phone while driving
- it is illegal to look at your cell phone while driving; that includes taking photos
- it is illegal to drive on sidewalks, walkways, or the Malecon
- it is illegal to drive on a beach
- it is illegal to park at a red curb
- you must use your arms as a turn signal when you are turning

Mega Ciro's is a popular rental company, and also our favorite. Because of their popularity, lines can be long in the high season, so my advice is to get there early.

Because of their popularity, they typically don't respond to online booking inquiries and, as far as I know, they only take advanced booking reservations for multi-day rentals.

They are only open from 9am (we are on island time, so it is typically around 9:15am) until 5pm and they don't deliver to your hotel. But they have newer golf carts and almost exclusively positive reviews. We have never had any problems.

Their office is a small room. Only one group gets into the air-conditioned office at a time, and others line up outside on the sidewalk. At the counter, you will need to give them your driver's license, which they will keep until you return the cart.

They will fill out the rental form, you sign it, and you are good to go.

Mega Ciro's offer rentals by the hour, from 9am-5pm, for 24h, and for multiple days. If you do the [self-guided Isla Mujeres Tour](#) in this guide, then the 9-5 option is perfectly fine, as it can bring you back by 2pm.

Mega Ciro rent:

- small golf cars with a bench for two in the front, and a backward facing bench for 2 in the back (at the time of writing, this cart rents at 1,300 Pesos from 9-5, and you don't even need to gas it up)
- golf carts with 4 forward facing seats
- golf carts with 6 seats

6) Taxis

The red taxis are everywhere in Isla Mujeres, especially in the El Centro downtown area. But you can find plenty of taxis near the tourist destinations in the southern part of the island, too. If, for some reason, there is no taxi around, just go to one of the main north-south routes (Av Ruedie Medina, Av Juarez, Carr Sac Bajo, Jesus Martinez Ross, Payo Obispo, Perimetral Ote, Perimetral Pte) and wait a few minutes.

The [main taxi stand](#) on Isla Mujeres is right next to the Ultramar ferry pier ([map](#)).

At the time of writing, fares are about 100 Pesos in El Centro, 150 Pesos to the mid-section and 200 Pesos to Punta Sur (south point).

If you are looking for an all-inclusive resort, be advised that you will not find any Cancun-style all-inclusive mega resorts on Isla Mujeres. Resorts and hotels that are all-inclusive or have all-inclusive options are rare on Isla Mujeres and they have much fewer dining options.

Here are your best options for luxury stays on Isla Mujeres:

- **MIA Reef Isla Mujeres ([map](#), [reviews](#), [book](#))**
5-star family friendly all-inclusive resort in the extreme north of Isla Mujeres near Playa Norte. Some people love it, some people hate it
- **Zoetry Villa Rolandi Isla Mujeres Cancun ([map](#), [reviews](#), [book](#))**
5-star luxury all-inclusive resort located mid-island; the resort is adult oriented, but allows kids; it is closed until December 2024 for renovation
- **Impression Isla Mujeres by Secrets ([map](#), [reviews](#), [book](#))**
5-star luxury all-inclusive adult-only resort located near Punta Sur in the south of Isla Mujeres
- **Hotel Privilege Aluxes Isla Mujeres ([map](#), [reviews](#), [book](#))**
5-star adult-only hotel at Playa Centro near the intersection of Playa Norte that offers regular and all-inclusive packages
- **Hotel Belo Isla Mujeres ([map](#), [reviews](#), [book](#))**
5-star hotel located mid-island offering regular and all-inclusive packages

3.5.2 Villa Kiin

([map](#), [reviews](#), [book](#))

Villa Kiin is the hotel in which we have stayed most frequently in Isla Mujeres. Its location directly on Playa Norte (Mexico's best beach) and price less than half of other hotels cannot be beat, if you can accept its shortcomings.

The upsides are:

- Directly on the northern end of Playa Norte
- Directly near some of the best snorkeling spots in Isla Mujeres
- A small complimentary breakfast (2 slices of toast, one packet of strawberry jam, one packet of margarine, one glass of orange juice and one cup of coffee per person) are included, even though the reservation does not state that; breakfast is served at Buho's ([map](#)) one block away, directly on Playa Norte. You can add more
- Beach towels that can be exchanged every two days
- Room cleaning starting on day four
- The hotel has a pool
- Every room has air conditioning and a ceiling fan
- Rooms now have a small fridge, which is not mentioned in the room descriptions
- Free drinking water is provided 24/7 on the grounds

The downsides are:

- Wifi access only in the lobby. Internet access is OK, but not fast enough for streaming. The lobby is not airconditioned and you may want to put mosquito repellent on in the evening when you sit in the lobby. The lobby is too far away from the rooms, so that you cannot receive any wifi signal in the rooms. Honestly, I think getting off the internet for a few days and only occasionally checking emails is a good thing. But if you need to work during your stay, then Villa Kiin is not for you
- If you are lucky, you will get a weak LTE data signal in the rooms once in a while. A more stable, but weak data signal can be found near to pool or on the balconies
- The shower does not produce real warm water. It is, however, warm enough to take a shower
- There is no room cleaning on the first 3 days
- Reception hours are from 7:30am until 10:30pm. If you arrive or depart outside of these hours, you will need to let them know

Villa Kiin is located directly on the beach, but the access doors are locked because other vacationers were trespassing and using the hotel's grounds to relax, use the hotel's hammocks and chairs and to take showers. This was causing security concerns. Access is only through the lobby, and the gate right next to it. Hotel guests get a wrist band that they need to wear during their stay to identify themselves as hotel guests.

Unless you rent one of the bungalows, you will stay in one of the two three-story buildings. From the rooms you can see the MIA Reef Hotel through the palm trees and, if you stay on the upper floors, you will see Playa Norte with its turquoise waters through the palm trees, too.

Outside the room are a hammock, two wooden chairs, and a small table. On the inside, there is a king, queen size bed, or two single beds, a TV and one or two nightstands, a small bench, a desk, a mirror, a ceiling fan, a fridge, and a quiet and efficient A/C. There is no phone, no microwave, no water heater and no wifi. Adjacent to the bedroom is a bathroom with a shower. Two complimentary small bottles of shampoo and two small bars of soap are provided when you check in and when the room is cleaned. Off the bedroom is a small open closet with some hangers.

Reservations do not state that breakfast is included in the room rate, but the hotel gives out vouchers for a free breakfast in at Buho's Beach Bar ([map](#), [reviews](#)) which is directly on the Playa Norte beach and only a 3 min walk from the hotel. The free breakfast consists of 2 slices of toast with 1 margarine and 1 strawberry jam packet, a glass of orange juice and either coffee with a refill or tea.

The hotel provides beach towels free of charge. Beach loungers are not provided but can be rented from vendors on the beach.

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Long story short: This hotel is in a fantastic location and provides very good value, if you can accept the downsides. We have stayed here several times and will definitely stay here again.



3.6.1 Playa Norte – the best beach in Mexico

([map](#), [reviews](#))

The star attraction of Isla Mujeres is **Playa Norte** - it is often called the best beach in Mexico and I believe there is some truth to it. It runs the entire length of the northwestern side of Isla Mujeres. Some locals also consider [Playa Centro](#) to be part of Playa Norte.

As you may have guessed, Playa Norte is the busiest beach in Isla Mujeres, so if you are looking for tranquility, then you may want to consider other beaches or go there before 10am. It will be packed in the afternoon, especially the southern side of Playa Norte where all the resorts are.

Tip: Since most visitors don't get to the Playa Norte beach before 10am or even 11am, you can still have some quiet time and a mostly empty beach before 10am. Finding parking near Playa Norte, even for golf carts, will get increasingly difficult after 10am.

Playa Norte consists of compacted seashell powder with a soft white sand layer on top.

Playa Norte has good snorkeling. Please go to the [Isla Mujeres Snorkeling Section \(section 3.7\)](#) for more detailed information, photos, and videos.

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3.6.4 Garrafon de Castilla

([map](#), [reviews](#))

Garrafon de Castilla is the small sister of the nearby all-inclusive Garrafon Reef Park. It is a cash-only beach club which has an admission fee of 150 Pesos per adult, with discounted rates for children.

It can easily be reached by bus (the combined line 3 and 4 bus needs about 35-40min, and the line 4 bus 30-35min) or car.

Lockers can be rented for 100 Pesos plus a 100 Peso refundable deposit.

There are free restrooms and showers.

Food and drinks come at an extra charge – the prices are reasonable.

Snorkeling gear and life vests can be rented for a fee.

menú	
Los Arrecifes de Garrafón	
PARA COMPARTIR - TO SHARE	
Guacamole	180
Pico de Gallo	80
Papas fritas - French Fries	180
Hamburguesa - Burger	250
Dedos de pescado - Fish Fingers	260
NACHOS	
Tortilla chips, beans, cheese, pico de gallo and guacamole.	
Totopos con frijol, queso, pico de gallo y guacamole.	
Natural	200
Pollo - Chicken	240
Pastor - Pork	260
Camarones - Shrimp	280
QUESADILLAS	
Flour tortilla with melted cheese and pico de gallo.	
Tortilla de harina con queso y pico de gallo.	
Queso - Cheese	200
Pollo - Chicken	210
Pastor - Pork	220
Camarones - Shrimp	250
Champiñones - Mushrooms	220
TACOS	
Flour tortilla, roasted onion, and peppers.	
Tortilla de harina, cebolla y pimientos rostizados.	
Pollo - Chicken	220
Pastor - Pork	240
Camarones - Shrimp	270
Pescado - Fish	260
Champiñones - Mushrooms	220
BURRITOS	
With rice, beans, onions, peppers, cheese, and guacamole.	
Con arroz, frijol, cebolla, pimientos, queso y guacamole	
Pollo - Chicken	240
Pastor - Pork	260
Camarones - Shrimp	280
Champiñones - Mushrooms	220
CEVICHE OR COCKTAIL	
Camarones - Shrimps	350
Pescado - Fish	300
Mixto - Mixed	380
PLATILLOS - MEALS	
FAJITAS	
With rice, beans, and flour tortillas.	
Con arroz, frijoles y tortillas de harina.	
Pollo - Chicken	260
Pastor - Pork	280
Camarones - Shrimp	290
Pescado - Fish	280
Champiñones - Mushrooms	220
CAMARONES - SHRIMP	
With rice and french fries.	
Con arroz y papas fritas	
Tempura	320
Mojo de Ajo - Garlic	320
Diabla	320
Al coco - Coconut	350
PESCADO - FISH	
With rice and french fries.	
Con arroz y papas fritas	
Mojo de Ajo - Garlic	280
Diabla	280
EXTRAS	
Tortillas (3)	15
Totopos - Chips	25
Arroz - Rice	50
PRECIOS EN PESOS MEXICANOS	
PAGO EN EFECTIVO, NO TARJETA	
PRICES IN MEXICAN PESOS	
CASH ONLY PAYMENT, NO CARDS	

The club has a small white sand beach which is accessible through wooden stairs. The beach has free loungers, some come with beach umbrellas, which are available on a first-come-first-serve basis.

To get into the water, one will need to walk over approx. 5ft of small stones which are not sharp. Afterwards, there is sand, and further in there is seagrass.

When you get into the water, you will likely be greeted by a swarm of fish hoping to be fed.



Garrafon de Castilla itself does not have any reef, but it is very close to the Garrafon Reef. Once you are in the water, swim left (south) and the reef will start just a hundred feet near the shore. You can swim all the way to the pier of nearby [Garrafon Reef Park](#).

The pier is the border to which you are allowed to swim. If you continue on, then a guard will call you back.

The reef has some healthy corals and a fair amount of reef fish.

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The park is open from 11am to 5pm, but it has been reported that they do not always open at 11.

3.6.7 IceBar Mexico

([map](#), [reviews](#), [website](#))

IceBar Mexico is literally the coolest place on Isla Mujeres. Its main attractions are a cute palm tree lined white sand beach and the Ice Bar, which is a small bar that is cooled to 18 F (-8 C) and in which everything is made of ice. Not just the sculptures and the bar, but also the drinking glasses.

If you are afraid that you may catch a cold: they provide warm winter jackets that help keep you warm, but you should still not go in there when you are totally wet from sweating.

There are different tickets that you can buy:

- IceBar Experience: US\$21 per adult. It includes 2 beverages and a shot inside the IceBar
- Day Pass experience: US\$45 per adult, and US\$38 per minor: It includes the Buffet, Icebar Experience & Open bar of National drinks
- Access to the beach with its sun beds, lounge chairs, and tables is free. You can buy food and drinks from the menu, or buy a Day Pass or the IceBar Experience for a more unique experience. The water is hazy, and there is no snorkeling.

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3.7.1 Best on-the beach snorkeling in Isla Mujeres

The map below shows the best snorkeling spots in the Playa Norte area:



1 = [area 1 – snorkeling near the south of MIA Reef](#)

2 = [area 2 – snorkeling near Playa Norte south of MIA Reef](#)

3 = [area 3 – snorkeling at the lonely rock south of MIA Reef](#)

4 = [area 4 – snorkeling west of MIA Reef](#)

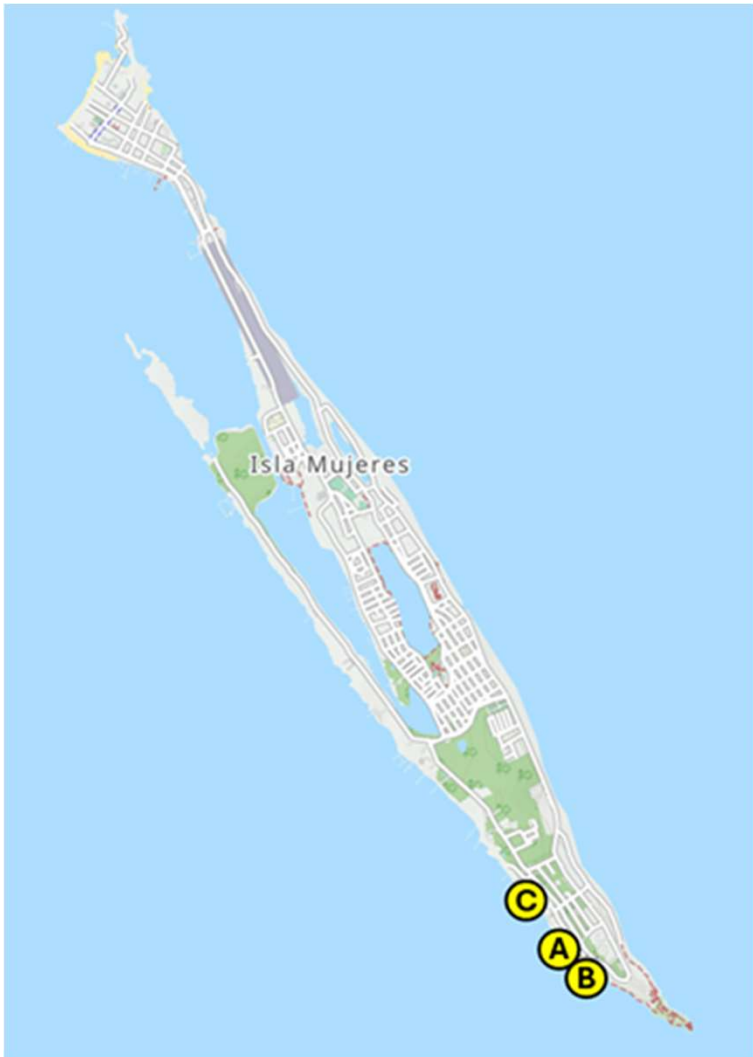
5 = [area 5 – snorkeling under the MIA Reef bridge](#)

6 = [area 6 - Piscina del Rey](#)

Please click on the links above to get to the individual reviews.

Isla Mujeres & Holbox

On the southern part of Isla Mujeres, snorkeling is restricted to various beach clubs, here is a small selection:



A = [Garrafon de Castilla](#)

B = [Garrafon Reef Park](#)

C = [Kin Ha Beach Club \(no snorkeling\)](#)

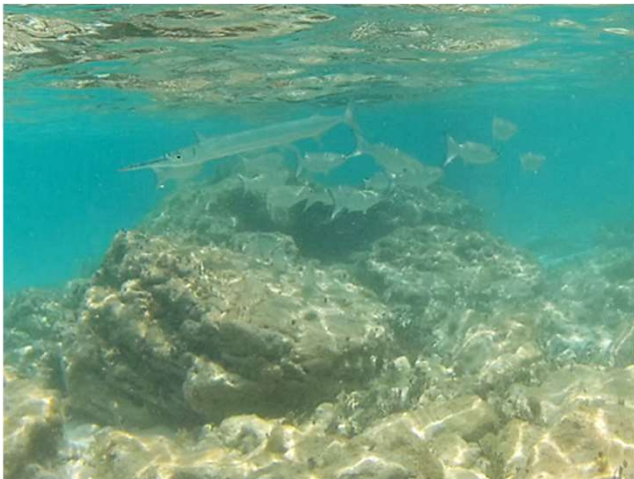
Due to dangerous waves and undercurrents, there is no on-the-beach snorkeling on the Caribbean (east) side of Isla Mujeres.

Area 1 – Snorkeling near the southern end of MIA Reef ([map](#))

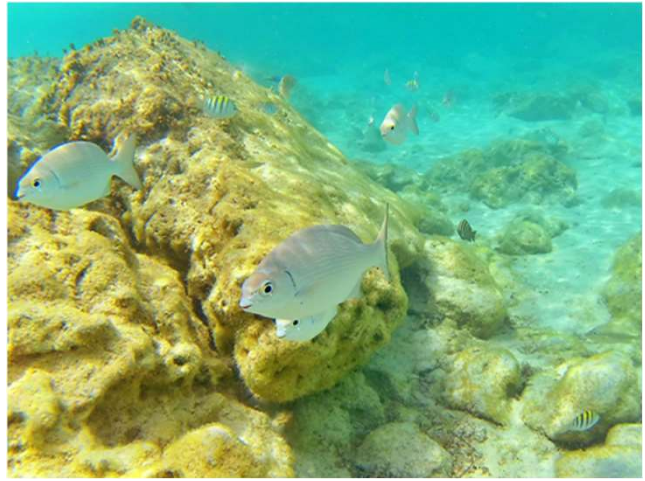
Believe it or not, some of the best snorkeling in Isla Mujeres can be found on Playa Norte. In fact the lagoon in which area 1 is located is the only area on Playa Norte where there is any good snorkeling.

On July 16, 2024, the government roped off area 3 – it is now forbidden to enter this area and snorkel there. Area 1 is the submerged rocky area that starts about 50 ft (15m) south of the island on which the MIA Reef resort sits and goes for another 50ft (15 m) until where the lonely orange ball is located that extends west from the rope with the other orange balls.

This area typically has lots of Sergeant Majors and some other fish.



Isla Mujeres & Holbox



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Area 2 – Snorkeling near Playa Norte south of MIA Reef ([map](#))

If you follow the roped off area with the orange balls from MIA Reef Resort all the way to the lonely house on Playa Norte, you will find some additional snorkeling by the rocks near the lonely house. Fish over here are by far not as plentiful as in Area 1, but it is still worth checking this area out.

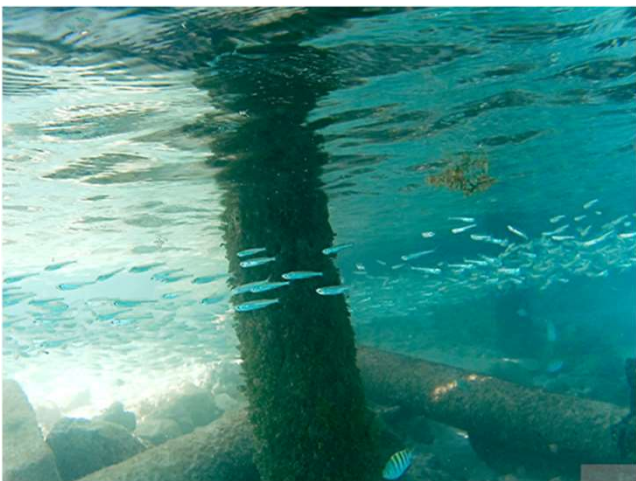


Area 5 – Snorkeling under the MIA Reef bridge ([map](#))

The largest number of fish can be found under the MIA Reef bridge, close to the MIA Reef. The fish that live here are in the hundreds. The water is a bit hazy, but still good enough for snorkeling. Sometimes you will see people feeding the fish, which leads them to being surrounded by hundreds of fish. Because the water here is not very deep, this is the best snorkeling spot for beginners.



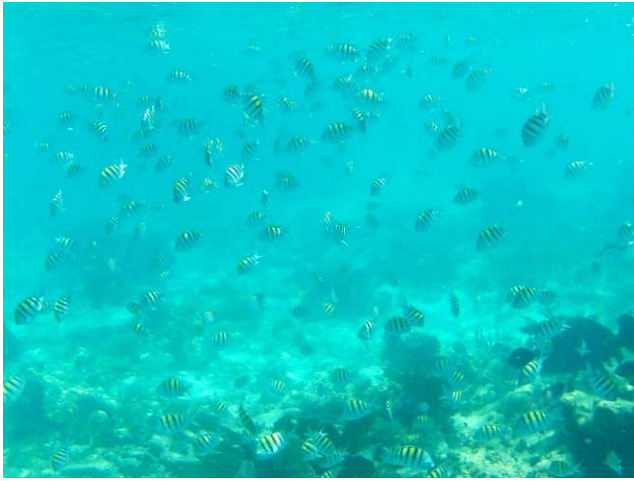
Isla Mujeres & Holbox



3.7.2.2 Isla Contoy tours

These tours typically stop at the Ixlache Reef directly south of Isla Contoy. In our opinion, this reef has some of the best off-the-beach snorkeling in the area, with lots of colorful fish.

Unfortunately, snorkeling stops here often only last for 10min.



Isla Mujeres & Holbox



Isla Contoy is a strictly protected national park and there are only very few operators that are licensed to land on the island. Please note that the company that you book the tour with will most likely not operate the tour, but book you on one of the licensed tour operator boats.

As such, it is highly likely that the boat will pick up more passengers in Cancun after you board in Isla Mujeres.

Isla Mujeres & Holbox

Isla Contoy is a strictly protected natural habitat. Visitors are not allowed to apply any sunscreen or mosquito spray, and they are limited to a gorgeous 1,000 ft (300 m) long beach and a roped off swimming area which has no notable snorkeling. At the northern end are some wooden posts on which you can often see pelicans sitting. When carefully approached, you can get fairly close to them.

There are also two short walking trails which can be accessed with a licensed tour guide.

Because the number of daily visitors is limited to 200, you can have much of the beach almost for yourself.



Isla Mujeres & Holbox



Isla Mujeres & Holbox

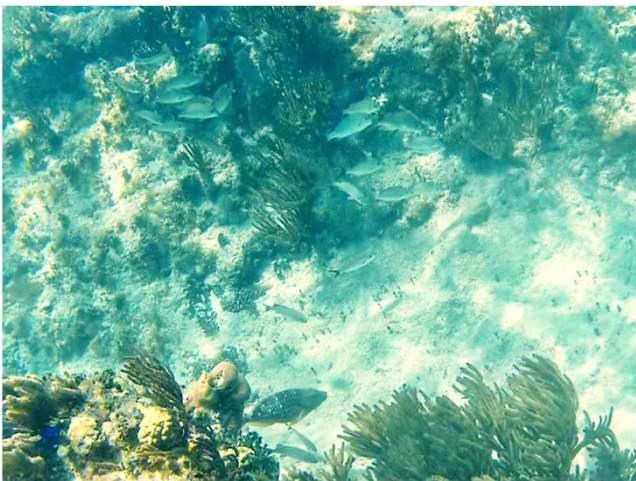


El Farito Reef / Lighthouse Reef ([map](#), [reviews](#), [tours](#))

I really liked El Farito Reef. It does not have as many fish as [Manchones Reef](#), but the depth is only 10-16 ft (3-5 m), so you get much closer to the fish.

And because the water is crystal clear most of the time, snorkeling here is a pleasure.

One thing I really liked was to take a video of the reef with all its fish and then move the camera up over the water and see the lighthouse.



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5. El Pescador Statue ([map](#))

Inside the roundabout is the Fishermen statue El Pescador. It is dedicated to the fishermen of Isla Mujeres and the inscription reads: The Fisherman - Cristino Avila to his memory and to that of all those fishermen who with canoe and sail fought at sea in search of daily income.



Make a 90 degree turn at the roundabout and walk along Adolfo Lopez Mateos, where the next stop is located.

6. Isla Mujeres Sign and Skeleton Bench ([map](#))

Past the side entrance of the luxury resort Privilege Aluxes and the Satay restaurant, you will find a store with an Isla Mujeres sign and a bench with a skeleton, two dolphins and lots of starfish and seashells.



Continue your tour on Adolfo Lopez Mateos past the main entrance of the luxury resort Privilege Aluxes to the next intersection where your next stop is located.

7. Downtown Cemetery & Andres Quintana Roo Monument ([map](#))

At the intersection across the street, you can see a monument of Mexican politician, lawyer, and writer Andres Quintana Roo (1787-1851), who was one of the most influential men in the Mexican War of Independence. The Mexican state of Quintana Roo is named in his honor.

As a member of the Congress of Chilpancingo, Andres Quintana Roo presided over the National Constituent Congress, which drafted the Mexican Declaration of Independence in 1813.

The Andres Quintana Roo school behind the monument was built in 1964 and named him, too.



Across the street from the monument, you will see a painted wall, which encloses the downtown cemetery. You can see many colorful tombs and gravesites.

Isla Mujeres & Holbox



The cemetery contains the empty tomb of pirate Fermin Antonio Mundaca y Marecheaga.

You can find the tomb by entering the cemetery and taking the first walkway that branches off to the right. Walk as far as you can, and then make another right at the tomb that blocks your way. Look around, and you will see this tomb:



Who was Pirate Mundaca, and why is he famous?

Fermin Anonio Mundaca y Marecheaga was born in 1825 in Bermeo of Santa Maria, Spain. He made a fortune in the New World by capturing and selling Mayan slaves to plantations in e.g. Cuba, and probably also as a pirate – he bragged that he was a pirate, but there is no proof that has survived until today. In 1858, he settled down in Isla Mujeres, and built Vista Alegre (Happy View), a large hacienda that later covered over 40% of Isla Mujeres.

The hacienda housed livestock, vegetable and fruit gardens, and exotic plants. It also contained a sundial garden that was called: The Rose of the Winds.

Later in life, he fell in love with Martiniana (Prisca) Gomez Pantoja, nicknamed La Triguena (the brunette), who was born and raised in Isla Mujeres. She was reportedly ‘a willowy woman with green eyes, white skin bronzed by the Caribbean sun and long, straight hair’ who was 37 years younger than him.

To win her over, Mundaca dedicated the arches of his sprawling hacienda 'The Entrance of the Triguena', and the road 'The Pass of the Triguena'.

Martiniana eventually married somebody else, and lonely Mundaca slowly went insane and lived the rest of his life in solitude, and later died in Merida.

At some time before his death, he carved the skull and crossbones on his tomb in the Downtown Cemetery and also the words: As you are, I was. As I am, you will be.

When you exit the cemetery, continue to the left for 2 more cross streets and turn into Av Guerrero where your next stop is located.

3.9 Self-guided driving tour of the southern part of Isla Mujeres

Our recommendation is to rent a golf cart, or if you feel comfortable with it: a scooter, and explore Isla Mujeres by yourself.

We have introduced the best [golf cart rentals](#) and [scooter rentals](#) earlier.

If you prefer a guided tour, there are plenty of island tours that you can choose from.

Even though we have never done a guided tour, we have heard nothing but extremely positive reviews for Isla Driver Robby ([website](#)) and El Camino Tours ([website](#)).

The following self-guided driving tour of Isla Mujeres leaves out the El Centro/ Downtown area, as we have a separate [self-guided walking tour of El Centro in Isla Mujeres](#).

The Self-guided driving tour of the southern part of Isla Mujeres can be accomplished in 4-5h, but our advice is to not rush. Take your time, and visit some stores, restaurants, or other sights that you are interested in.

Here is the route with 33 stops:

Isla Mujeres & Holbox



- 0 = [Benito Juarez Garcia Monument and Murals](#)
- 1 = [Isla Brewing Company](#)
- 2 = [Murals](#)
- 3 = [Mango Café](#)
- 4 = [Ship Houses](#)
- 5 = [Murals and Swan House](#)
- 6 = [Casa Crayola](#)
- 7 = [Lobster, Turtle, and Shark Monuments](#)
- 8 = [Dolphin Monument](#)
- 9 = [Octavio Paz Monument](#)
- 10 = [Rainbow Stairs, Dragon Fruit House, and Murals](#)

- 11 = [Painted Car Parts](#)
- 12 = [Murals](#)
- 13 = [Seashell Sellers](#)
- 14 = [Murals](#)
- 15 = [Seashell House](#)
- 16 = [Punta Sur](#)
- 17 = [Scenic Overlook](#)
- 18 = [Murals](#)
- 19 = [Murals](#)
- 20 = [Ramon Bravo Prieto Monument](#)
- 21 = [Tortugranja](#)
- 22 = [Icebar Mexico](#)
- 23 = [Hacienda Mundaca](#)
- 24 = [Mercado Isla Colonia](#)
- 25 = [Murals](#)
- 26 = [Murals](#)
- 27 = [Murals](#)
- 28 = [Murals](#)
- 29 = [Chedraui](#)
- 30 = [Murals](#)
- 31 = [Whale Shark Monument](#)
- 32 = [Dolphin Monument](#)

0. Benito Juarez Garcia Monument and Murals ([map](#))

This monument honors Benito Pablo Juárez García, who was the 26th president of Mexico from 1858 until his death in office in 1872. He was of Zapotec ancestry, and the first and only indigenous president of Mexico.

Benito Juarez was born in Oaxaca in 1806 to a poor, rural, Zapotec family, and orphaned as a child.

He was elected Governor of Oaxaca, before taking over federal posts, including Minister of Justice, and President of the Supreme Court.



You have likely come from Av Rueda Medina. Make sure that you do not go back to this road, continue south on Av Juarez, which follows the Caribbean (eastern) coastline of Isla Mujeres.

During your drive, you will pass beautiful murals, and get some nice views of the Caribbean Sea.

Isla Mujeres & Holbox



Follow the road until another road (Av Perimetral Ote) branches off to the left. Here is your next stop.

1. Isla Brewing Company / Cerveza Isla ([map](#), [reviews](#), [website](#))

Isla Brewing Company is the first and only micro brewery on Isla Mujeres. Their restaurant is open from noon until 9pm Mon – Sat, and they are closed on Sundays.

Since you are here likely too early, keep them in mind for another time, or when you come back this afternoon.

Please be reminded that driving a golf cart after consuming alcohol is illegal, and it is illegal to carry open alcohol containers while driving a golf cart.

Isla Brewing Company make several types of beer, which they consider handcrafted beer with a Caribbean touch. Their food is good, too.



Continue on Av Perimetral Ote to your next stop.

2. Murals ([map](#))

Av Perimetral Ote has some nice murals.



Continue on Av Perimetral Ote to your next stop.

16. Punta Sur ([map](#), [reviews](#))

Punta Sur (South Point) is one of the main attractions of Isla Mujeres, and is being visited not just by Isla Mujeres tours, but also by tours from Cancun.

When you get there, be advised that the first exit from Perimetral Ote, where it makes a big 180-degree turn, is actually the exit. You must continue a few feet more and take the second road to the left, which leads you to a comparably big parking lot.

Punta Sur is significant, because:

- It was an important Mayan religious site, dedicated to Ixchel, the goddess of fertility, medicine, and happiness
- Punta Sur is the easternmost point in Mexico - there are parties here to greet the New Year as the first rays of sunshine in the new year will be seen here
- It is the southernmost point of Isla Mujeres
- It has some of the most beautiful cliffs in Isla Mujeres

The Yucatan Peninsula was one of the major area where the Mayans lived. The first cities were built here in the 6th century. Isla Mujeres was part of the Mayan province Ekab.

The island was dedicated to Ixchel, the goddess of fertility, medicine, and happiness.

Mayan girls on the verge of womanhood would travel to the temple of Ixchel on Isla Mujeres as a rite of passage marking their journey from childhood to adulthood, and to seek Ixchel's guidance for physical and spiritual maturity.

The ruin that you see today at Punta Sur is called a temple, but its use is not clear. It may have been used as a temple, and/or as a lighthouse.

Further structures that could resemble the temple of Ixchel, together with more than 100 artefacts and skeletal remains, were found at [Hacienda Mundaca](#).

In 1517, Francisco Fernandez de Cordoba discovered the island for the Spanish. He found a deserted island with at least one temple containing lots of statues of women, and thus called the island: Isla Mujeres – the Island of Women. It is not clear where on the island the temple was located.

Today, Punta Sur consists of two parts:

1) The free admission part: this is the northern area of Punta Sur with:

- Punta Sur letters



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- iguana statue



- Ixchel statue



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- statues of native women



- souvenir stores, a lighthouse (closed to the public), and good views.



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2) the paid admission part: This part is open from 7am until 6pm and you need to pay 100 Pesos per person – cash only. This is the much larger part of Punta Sur. It has short trails through the well-maintained nature of Punta Sur.



The trails lead to the southernmost point of Isla Mujeres, and along the cliffs.



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There is also an Isla Mujeres picture frame through which you can take a photo of yourself with the beautiful turquoise ocean and Cancun in the background.



The statues are:

- Mayan Watcher



- Mayan Notary



- Mayan Priest?



- Yaaxche (Mayan god - the Tree of Life who played a significant role in the creation of the Mayan people)



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- Mayan Trades: a sculptor and a trader?



- Family of Gonzalo Guerrero – the first of mixed race: a shipwrecked Spaniard who was enslaved by the Mayans in the Yucatan, but earned his freedom, and became a respected warrior. He raised three of the first mestizo (mixed European-Indigenous race) children in Mexico



- Pre-Hispanic Mayan Family of the Caribbean



- Mayan Priest?



- Ixchel



- Two statues of Pre-Hispanic Mayan Offerers



Isla Mujeres & Holbox

- Mayan Announcer with Sound Snail



There is also the Temple of Ixchel and/or lighthouse.



We saw several iguanas.



Be advised that there is no shade in the southern (paid) part of Punta Sur.

Exit the Punta Sur parking lot, and follow the Perimetral Ote street to the left around the corner where it changes its name to which turns into Perimetral Pte and where your next destination awaits.

17. Scenic Overlook ([map](#))

Park on the parking strip to the left and enjoy the view on the beautiful turquoise waters and Cancun in the background.



Continue north on Perimetral Pte to your next destination.

24. Mercado Isla Colonia ([map](#))

Mercado Isla Colonia is a typical mercado with produce vendors and restaurants. What is special about it is that there are murals seemingly everywhere inside and outside of the building – 12 in total.

Park your golf cart or scooter on the parking lot and walk into the building.



Isla Mujeres & Holbox



Isla Mujeres & Holbox



Continue to the end of Flamenco and then make a left onto Calle 7, then immediately another left onto Calle Espatula, and then an immediate right onto Calle Pato. This is where your next destination is.

4. Holbox

4.1 Why you should visit Holbox

([map](#))

Are you looking to relax on uncrowded white sand beaches with turquoise water and are you looking to get away from it all? Look no further, Isla Holbox in Mexico may fit your bill.

Holbox is a small town in the Northern part of the Mexico's Yucatan peninsula. It is so far away off the beaten path that you can relax on its beautiful beaches without being surrounded by lots of other noisy people. It is close enough to civilization that you can enjoy air conditioning, and electricity 24h a day, but far away enough away that there are only golf carts, bicycles and pedestrians on its compacted dirt roads, and sadly very unreliable and slow internet.

There is no decent snorkeling on any of the beaches, but there are plenty of tours that bring you to do whale watching (June through September), and discover a multitude of birds and plants on deserted islands.

We have traveled the world and I can honestly say that we have found the most beautiful and diverse seashells on Holbox's beaches.

4.2 When to Visit Holbox

Holbox is a destination that people visit year-round for several reasons.

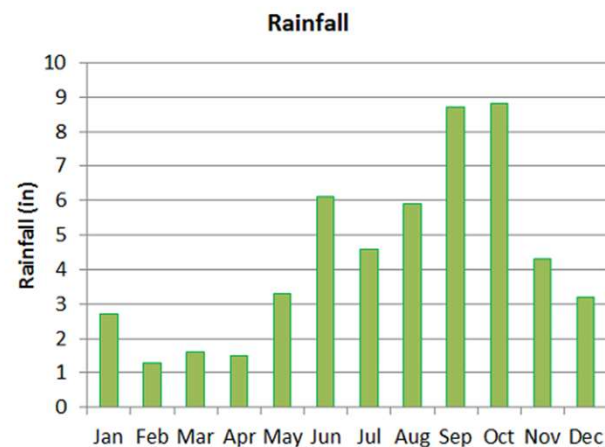
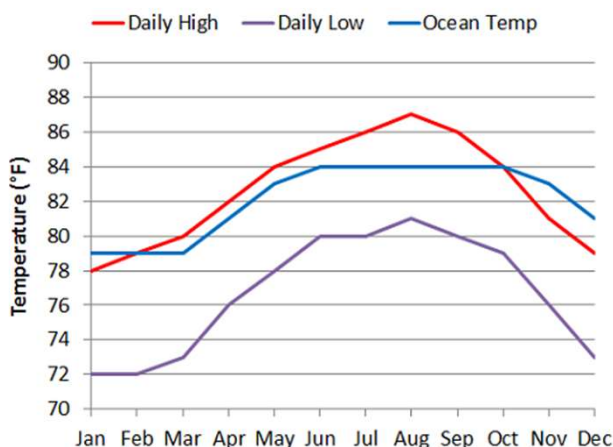
If you are looking for **wildlife**:

Whale shark season is June - September. During that time you can book tours to snorkel with the largest known fish species.

Flamingo season is April to October. During other months, you may see only a few flamingos at Punta Cocos and Punta Mosquito, but from April through October, their numbers in Holbox are exponentially bigger.

Bioluminescence tours to see this phenomenon operate during summer and fall when there is new moon, as complete darkness is needed. You can go to Punta Cocos during new moon to experience it yourself.

If you are looking for quality **beach time**: The diagrams below show the average temperatures and rainfall during the different months of the year. February to April are typically the driest months.



Here is a photo of Holbox from the airplane that flew us from the US to Cancun:



There are two ferry companies (9 Hermanos and Holbox Express). The only difference between them is that:
9 Hermanos has blue ferries and Holbox Express has red ferries
9 Hermanos leaves either port on the hour and Holbox Express on the half hour

Everything else is the same. Here are the timetables:

[Holbox Express](#) [9 Hermanos](#)

4.5 You arrived in Holbox – what now?

The ferry arrives south of town. The very first thing that I advise you to do is to apply mosquito repellent spray or lotion. We did not do it and got multiple sandfly bites.

From the ferry dock, you can either take a taxi - there are lots of taxis (yellow golf carts) waiting near the dock, or you can walk to your hotel. As Holbox is small, you should be able to walk to any hotel in town (or slightly outside town as our hotel was) in less than 10-15min. Should you walk, keep in mind that there are no asphalt roads on Holbox, but only compacted dirt roads. My suitcase with rollers was fine on the dirt roads. If there was any recent rain, then you may see that lower lying areas on some side streets may be filled with water which could make it difficult to walk through. There are plenty of streets and you can always avoid flooded roads.

When you walk through town, you will immediately realize that Holbox is not the secret off-the-beaten-path location that only few people know about anymore. Holbox is not as busy as Cancun, Cozumel, or Isla Mujeres, but it has evolved into a popular tourist destination. Besides the ever-present restaurants and souvenir stores, you will see quite a few small grocery stores and drug stores. There is no supermarket in Holbox, only lots of small grocery stores.

4.6 Where to stay in Holbox

Holbox has many hotel options and vacation rentals. Many beachfront hotels and vacation rentals are available for less than US\$150 per night.

Here is a map with hotels and vacation rentals that are available when you visit:



4.9.4 Punta Mosquito

([map](#), [reviews](#))

There are tours that take you to Punta Mosquito. You can theoretically walk there by yourself, but this involves trespassing over protected sandbanks for nesting birds of the Yum Balam Park, and therefore it should not be done.

If you follow the sandbanks towards the northeast, you will come to a sign and a marking on the sandbank that says that the entire sandbank behind this line is off-limits to people, as it is protected for nesting birds. The walk to this point is absolutely gorgeous and I can only recommend it. Also, you will see quite a few people sunbathing on the sandbank before the line.



The trip from the border to Punta Mosquito and back can only be done during low tide, and involves crossing a river that is said to harbor crocodiles.

To ensure that you get back from the sandbank in time, you can find the tide chart [here](#).

4.10 Murals / Street Art

Holbox has a fantastic Street Art scene. Many buildings have murals, and many houses are painted in bright colors. Just wander through the streets and you will find many murals. Here is a small collection:



4.11 Seashells

From street art to the artwork that mother nature produces: Holbox is a paradise for seashell lovers. There are large seashell areas on the beach and inside the water, where we have found some of the most interesting seashells.

Here is a photo:





5 Closing Remarks

ABOUT RUDY FROM BACKPACK & SNORKEL

I was born in Germany and emigrated to the US in 2003. My wife and I are a truly multinational couple: I, with my German background, and she with her Chinese heritage. Both of us live in the USA.

Sadly, working in the US means we have much fewer vacation days compared to other countries like e.g. Germany and thus we cannot travel very frequently.

Through a lot of trial and error, we have found our ideal travel and vacation style. **Making Memorable Moments** by focusing on important destinations, planning time for meeting the locals and, of course, for relaxation are our priorities.

We have also learned to appreciate local foods and try to eat as many local dishes as possible. Just for fun, we try to eat at one Chinese restaurant in each country we visit. It is absolutely amazing how different Chinese food is all over the planet.



MAKING MEMORABLE MOMENTS

You may take 10,000 photos during your vacation, rush from one attraction to the next, but what you will remember in your heart is how you were **Making Memorable Moments**.

For me, that was e.g. Spider Rock in Canyon de Chelly (ever heard of this US National Park?). When I first saw it, I was blown away by this majestic natural obelisk and the beautiful canyon that it sits in. I have been there two more times and still feel the same.

Or think of Isla Mujeres, a small island outside Cancun, Mexico. On the surface, Playa Norte is supposedly Mexico's most beautiful beach and it is always crowded and the boats that anchor there play loud music. Below the surface, Isla Mujeres is very relaxed, quite walkable and it has friendly locals, good authentic Mexican food and good international cuisine and is often very affordable.

Isla Mujeres is our personal paradise!



PACK YOUR BACKPACK & SNORKEL AND LET'S GO

Our travel style has evolved over the years. We are packing light these days when we travel and typically only need a small backpack per person - see my [Traveling Light Guide](#).

With this guide, I want to provide value to you and help you plan your own relaxing vacations with the goal of **Making Memorable Moments!**

Please contact me if you have any questions or comments.